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# BIG SPRING



# BIG SPRING

## The Casual Biography of a Prairie Town

*By*  
SHINE PHILIPS

*Drawings By*  
JERRY BYWATERS

*New York*  
PRENTICE-HALL, INC.

1942

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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# BIG SPRING



## INTRODUCTION

A feller came moseying into my drugstore the other night — a stranger to these parts he was — looked like he'd been dumped out of an airplane that was grounded on account of the weather. We had right smart weather that day. At two o'clock in the afternoon it was go degrees in the shade and the shade durn hard to find. Long about dark a sandstorm roared in, a real humdinger. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. At ten o'clock sharp we had some free electrical fireworks with sound effects in the sky, like the world was coming to an end. Then we had a hailstorm with pellets as big as hen's egg hitting the roof. This was followed by a waterspout that lasted maybe half an hour, and then I'll be John Brownded if we didn't have a dry norther that would send you hunting for your long ones. And the sand began to blow again. Must have come from way over in New Mexico because the mud was ankle deep around here.

Somewhere along the line in this full house of meteorology, one of our most revered modern conveniences had to make a forced landing.

Well, this feller — I reckon he was heading for California — was plumb disgusted.

"What kind of a so-and-so place is this," he griped. "One minute I need air conditioning; the next I need an overcoat."

"You don't like our weather?" I asked him.

"I do not," he said, grim-like.

## INTRODUCTION

"Well, I'll tell you," I said. "You just hold your horses and wait a minute and it'll change."

He looked kind of miffed. "That doesn't answer my original question," he said. "Where am I?"

"You're in Big Spring, Texas," I told him. "The biggest little town in the U.S.A."

"Is that so," he said sarcastically. "Give me a chocolate ice cream soda. My mouth is full of grit."

"Maybe you ought to keep it shut," I told him, fizzing the carbonated water into the chocolate syrup. He made me tired, that feller.

He looked kind of surprised, so I put two scoops of ice cream into the soda to make up for the crack.

"Here you are," I said. "We got no control over the weather, you know. Never did have. Don't reckon they do any better along that line where you come from."

"There's just one more thing I want to ask you," this feller said. "How did they ever happen to put the biggest little town in the U.S.A. in this particular Godforsaken spot?"

I'm telling you, that got my dander up. When I thought what it had cost in working and slaving and living and dying to put Big Spring here, it made me mad to have anybody get flippant about it.

"That's a long story," I snapped. "A mighty long story."

"That's just what I need," said Smarty. "A very long story."

"Serve you right if I told you," I said to him, thinking that in the old days we would already be out in the street fighting it out. But I guess civilization has made us soft.

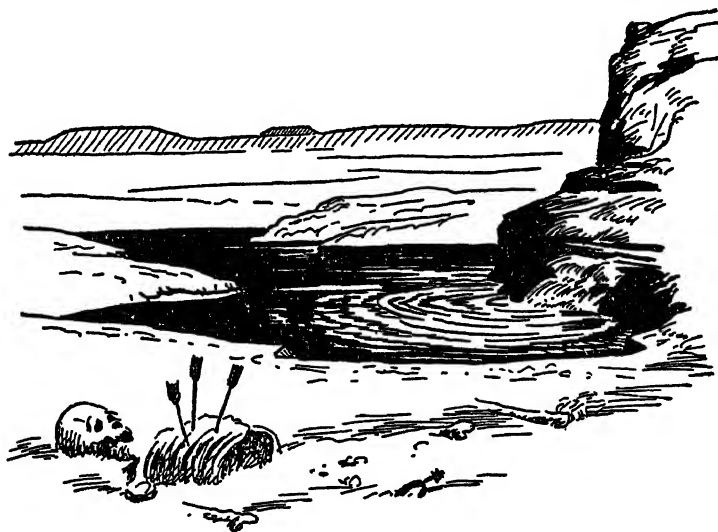
"I couldn't feel worse," he said, sucking on his straw.

So I told him.

# 1

## WATERHOLE

**I**t looks like God kind of made it easy for Big Spring to be a town three hundred miles each way from everything and a natural jumpin' off place. If you don't know where Big Spring is, it's in West Texas, in the foothills



*The Big Spring.*

of the Cap Rock, where the Great Plains start, running and rolling all the way north, clear through to Colorado. Nary a bush to interfere with your vision, and you can see as far as your eyes are good up there on the Ballies — rolling coun-

## WATERHOLE

try, open-faced as a Waterbury watch, and monotonous as a nagging woman if you don't care for it, but it looks like you get to, in spite of yourself. Sometimes I think it's something about the air — so clear and blue and kind of unpolluted and so durn much of it — and the space and the distance. Why on a clear day, you can stand on top of one of these little hills around Big Spring and see to hell and gone, way over to Lamesa, and that's forty-five miles.

But a town don't just up and come about. Like most things, there's always a reason for it. Out here it was water, just plain drinking water. In the early days water made or broke men in these parts and it made towns too. Big Spring comes by its name honest. It was one of the few spots in this great sweep of country where water was available for man and beast from a spring which flowed thousands of barrels of crystal clear, cold water every hour, sort of like a miracle.

I don't reckon anybody knows how long this "Big Spring" has been attracting humans, but the spring itself is a right historic spot. A good while before the Texas and Pacific Railroad came along, it was a stopping place on the Comanche War Trail. The Indian tribes scrapped over it. Yep, the Indians drank water too. Most folks never heard of an Indian doing anything but scalping a White Man, but from what I've heard tell, the Indians were at all times in as much danger of the White Man scalping them. Anyhow, the Indians were always scalping each other over Big Spring and a few coyotes to boot. There were just a few waterholes in this whole country — Moss Spring and Big Spring being the only two in a radius of sixty miles — so it was easy to see why men and beasts fought for their rights when it came to a showdown about a waterhole.

The spring proper gushed out of a curious rock formation at the base of one of our bare mountains that towered over

## WATERHOLE

a "draw." In case you don't know what a draw is, it's an empty gulch, dry as a Methodist sermon 'til it rains and then it's liable to be a raging torrent that looks like the Mississippi River gone all out. Most of the time it don't rain. Well, this changeable piece of scenery was named Sulphur Draw, and the reason Big Spring got to be an honest-to-goodness town instead of a floating population around a waterhole was because in the eighties the Texas and Pacific Railroad followed Sulphur Draw.

When the engineers surveyed the route between the hills, they ran the line along the space where it wouldn't cost too much and got a gravity flow from the Big Spring itself about two miles south of the railroad. It was just natural for the railroad to follow the draw because the Indians and frontier folks had been using old Sulphur Draw for a readymade highway long before the steel rails and concrete ribbons began to stray across the country. Sulphur Draw is the longest dry draw in the State of Texas, starting way up in New Mexico and meandering across four whole Texas counties.

Of course, there were already some people out here before the T & P started stringing its rails over this area of desolation and drouth in an effort to beat another railroad to the Pacific Ocean. People were out here for one reason and another — some of them ranching and some collecting buffalo bones and hunting and some of them for their health — lung trouble — and the fact that something was wrong with their records back home and they came out here because it was a longer distance between sheriffs. When the railroad came, a lot more people came to work on it and a tent city which was mostly the hide huts of buffalo hunters got mighty full of life. Then pretty soon some of the more enterprising capitalists began to haul in lumber and build stores and



## WATERHOLE

houses and before you could say tumbleweed, Big Spring was a going concern.

When Big Spring began to recognize itself as a municipality it had a business district that consisted of eight saloons, two general merchandise stores, one Chinese laundry, two efficient gambling houses (and the things that went with them), one drugstore with a full stock, and one kind of small drugstore, one bank, one wooden school building that was two stories high where the Masonic Lodge met upstairs, one white stone court house where the owls and the elected officers roosted and got to looking alike, three churches (never crowded much), two wagonyards with equal accommodations for the horses and men, only the horses were better taken care of. Each saloon had its pool hall but we had a couple of extras for fear there wouldn't be enough. We had one saddle shop that did a good business, two blacksmith shops where the horses were "re-tired," wagons repaired, and spurs sharpened.

Main Street ran kind of north and south — not too straight — down to the depot. Here there was a wooden hotel for drummers, and railroad men who made enough to stay there. The hotel was where the champion domino players hung out, and a game was always on somewhere in the hotel — but it mostly wasn't dominoes.

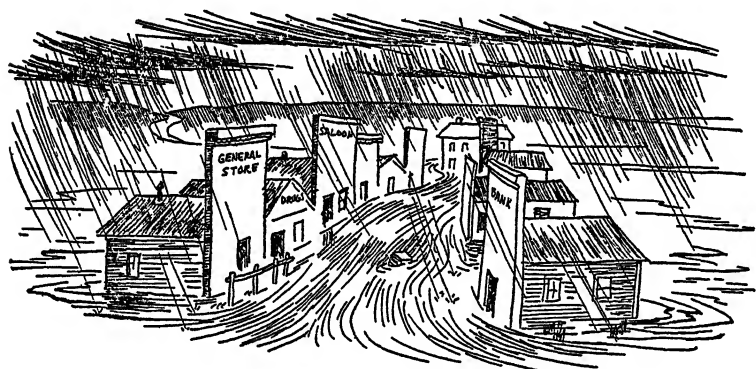
The business section was one block long. The lower end was in a sand pile. The upper end was topped off by the court house lawn, so-called, but only by courtesy as it was as bare as the back of your hand, without a sprig of grass and surrounded by a wooden fence.

The buildings were all one-story affairs with plenty of space between them. The livery stables were back of the buildings, facing in the opposite direction from the business houses, for reasons of fresh air (not for the horses' benefit,

## WATERHOLE

but for the folks across the street who had to breathe). The water, when it rained, flowed towards the depot. The rains and the hogs were the only street cleaners that we had. The main streets and the side roads were covered with horses and what goes with them.

The sidewalks were of wood lined with hitchin' racks (long poles supported by two or three sturdy posts), and each



*The water flowed toward the depot when it rained . . .*

home had a more or less ornated hitching post in front. At each end of the street we had "water troughs," which were as necessary as water in a filling station is now. Mr. and Mrs. Horse had to drink too. The watering trough was the place where the population met. The estimates on the size of this population vary so much that I'll just split the difference and say that we had about twelve hundred, all of which knew each other.

The watering trough was one of the most sociable spots in town. Everybody got there who was out on the street, and you could drive up and pass the time of day with your neighbors while Old Dobbin filled up. Even the ladies who led a rather restricted social life due to the fact they couldn't walk on the same side of the street with a saloon — and saloons

## WATERHOLE

were vastly in the majority — and couldn't join in any conversations with the Hot Stove League at the drugstore, could talk about the weather and things at the watering trough. About the only other common meeting ground for the members of both sexes was at the depot where everybody would drive to on Sunday and watch the train go through. But with the watering trough you didn't have to wait for the train.

"Howde do, Mrs. Perkins. Missed you at church last Sunday. Hope none of your folks was sick."

"The baby had the croup — and Zeb, my oldest — let that old piebald horse kick him. It's a good thing he's hardheaded like his Pa. Hardly scratched him. I put brown paper and vinegar on the knot, but I just couldn't get off."

"You shoulda been there. Mrs. Storey had on a new poplin with velvet ribbon on it. And a hat with feathers. I do believe she's making eyes at old man Caraway. These widows!"

"Well, he wore out two wives. Don't know what she could want of him."

"The Reverend preached a beautiful sermon. About brotherly love, it was."

"Oh, yes. That is nice. I think I've heard that one."

"I hear Cass Tompkins' been drinking again. Poor Arah. She does have a cross to bear."

"I don't know why she puts up with it. I know I wouldn't. His ranch is going to the dogs."

"And all those children!"

"They say the bank turned him down for a loan. I just don't know what'll come of them."

"Did you hear about Cora Fiddler? She's took to her bed."

"What's the matter with her?"

## WATERHOLE

"Heard she was just a little bit off."

"No!"

"Said it was too lonesome out there on that claim. She couldn't seem to stand the wind and sand no longer."

"I could of told Arch Fiddler that schoolmarm was no wife for a rancher. She was born a city girl and raised in town. But there's no accounting what men will do for a pretty face."

Just like now, what most people talked about was each other but you wouldn't want to hear more about that. We talked about the weather too, but it wasn't too interesting, although there was quite a lot of it. In the spring we had sandstorms mixed in with our frijole beans until we thought sand was part of the diet. The beans just didn't taste right without it. On some occasions you could not see across the street but it didn't make any difference because there wasn't much to see anyway. In the summer it was so hot and dry it would sunburn a horned frog, and we spent our time wondering how many cattle each ranch would lose through starvation before roundup time when they could start driving them or shipping them to market.

In the winter, we wondered when the next norther would hit. It wasn't so cold actually but when one of "them things" would come rolling off the Ballies to the north, blowing the freezing breath of the Rocky Mountains all over us, desolation would follow in its path and there would be a scarcity of coal or mesquite wood or cow chips to burn, according to what you were using for fuel in your particular circumstances. Dead cattle would cover the landscape, wherever they had drifted before the storm. Thousands of cattle went west in these last roundups of blue northers, and, when they did, they took some of our best citizens with them. The

## WATERHOLE

bodies of some of these men would be found in the drift with the cattle days afterward, when the storm had settled down and the skies had cleared. So you see, we always had something to talk about.

The two large stores were really general. They carried everything that anybody could use except a good reputation and you had to make that. J. & W. Fisher's which was founded in 1882, had for its motto: *The Store That Handles Everything*. Fisher's was more than a firm, it was an institution and played a great part in the development of this country. Joe Fisher was an Austrian Jew, born in the old country, who came to America and started to California. For no reason that anybody can remember, Joe Fisher stopped off at this waterhole and started a business, and a couple of years later his brother Will joined him. They took a long chance, and they made it, and for many years when anybody wanted to know anything or get anything, the stock answer was "See Fisher's."

The Fishers did more than furnish everything in the way of merchandise. They provided help and encouragement to the people, financed them through drouth and hard times, helped poor farmers take up the cheap land and found homes, and extended credit and financial aid to the ranching interests, though they sometimes had to carry them for years. The Fishers never demanded any mortgage except the best one there is: the word of a good man. They were the instigators of most civic moves and the leaders in charitable ones. No place was too difficult for them to ship goods to, and their merchandise was sent all over West Texas and New Mexico. One shipment of salt was sent by ox train to some far-off destination. The salt was valued at \$12.50 and the freight cost \$40.

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Seems like in every migration since time began there have been good Jewish men whom the Lord seemed to send along to kinda' finance the adventure and hold it together. I think it started in the United States when George Washington got his tail in a crack and a Jew came forward and put up the money to finish the Revolution.

Nobody made more concrete contributions to this community than Uncle Joe and Uncle Bill Fisher, and they have their counterparts all over our country — good Americans who always come forward when the time is ripe and give everything they've got to save the country.

The delivery wagon from one of the stores was used for a hearse until the latter part of 1906. The undertaker was a local furniture dealer who handled everything for the home except mother. The graves were dug by the hometown boys. Volunteer service by everyone. We had few flowers. If weeds wouldn't grow, you know what it would be with flowers. Anyhow we tried to give them to folks while they were alive.

The Corner Saloon was usually the tough one. It had a high mortality rate. The Klondyke was holding a good second until it closed. It was the village hot spot and had larger mirrors and bigger hanging kerosene lamps to amuse the cowhands when they got frisky enough to use their guns playfully. The man who owned the Klondyke bought his hanging lamps in large quantities and bought lamp chimneys by the barrel.

The wooden "awnings" were supported above the board walks by wooden posts until they were whittled down by loafing cowhands. Every cowhand had a good knife and every time he sat down he took it out and engraved his initials or a heart with somebody else's initials, or maybe the

## WATERHOLE

brand of his ranch. Main street presented quite an art gallery of these wood carvings. Sometimes they whittled the post right in two and it fell down and the awning caved in. Then after the dust cleared away, we had iron posts, but then a bronk pitched a cowhand against the iron posts and beat them up and him too.

Bronk bustin' took place right on Main Street in front of the drugstore, and since the board walk in front of the store was sort of low, we sometimes had to run in the store and shut the door to keep a visiting bucking broncho from making the rounds.

The board walks with their holes and their patched places were the worst place in the world for high heels, and women just had to have them even then. Every once in a while a cowboy would get a boot heel tethered in a hole and there would be hell to pay. However, most people walked careful-like and stepped over the holes. There never was any reason to hurry in those days unless it was from a shootin' or for similar personal reasons. The streets had no lights and anybody that ventured out at night carried a lantern, but there wasn't any special reason to venture out. Law-abiding people stayed home and the rest of them just slept where they happened to be. All the buggies had kerosene lamps which didn't help much because the horse had enough sense to know where there was a hole in the road and he walked right around it.

The houses were made out of wood and the style was somewhat limited by the lack of lumber. Most of them were kind of low on the ground and had a gallery in front with posts holding it up. There wasn't any use in painting them because if you did they got sandpapered overnight. The finest ones had a parlor but most of them just had a bed or two in every room except the kitchen. Whenever the family overflowed the size of the house, we built on a lean-to. The roof

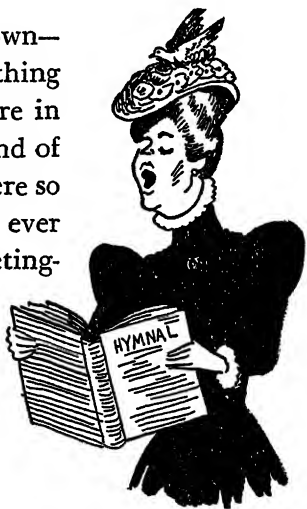
## WATERHOLE

of this usually leaked when it rained, but as you know, it didn't rain much.

The center of culture in town was the opera house which we thought was the last word. It had three drop curtains. One was a parlor scene, one was a street scene, and one was a woodland scene. This last was the most popular. Since none of us had ever seen any woods, it was worth the price of admission just to get a good look at a green woodland.

We didn't have any hospitals — don't suppose anyone had heard of one. The sick had to stay at a wagonyard or the hotel if they were strangers. But folks in town from the churches and the lodges didn't seem to know there was any such thing as a stranger, and they took turns "sitting up" with sick people they had just made the acquaintance of, sometimes for weeks at the time. Many of them had to buy the sick man's medicine and pay for his horse feed at the same time. Of course this was in the days before we found a substitute for "my brother's keeper."

There were three churches in town—wooden buildings, too, like everything else, except the churches always were in bad shape. No paint on 'em and kind of run-down looking. Seems like we were so hard put to make a living we hardly ever got around to fixing up the meeting-house. The good people went to church the year round, but in the summer we built brush arbors out east of town and then everybody went to church. Everyone looked forward to the revivals when they could bust their lungs singing hymns, eat up a lot of good home



*They could bust their lungs singing hymns . . .*



## WATERHOLE

cooking, and repent of their wickedness all in one full sweep. This didn't seem to have much to do with church which turned out to be mighty long-winded and pious in the winter time.

Early cowhands had a sense of direction that was uncanny. When the country around here was opened up, these boys cut out across the country and hit the mark just as well as they can now by air. In fact I was talking to a pilot on one of the airlines not so long ago and he said that the old trails were still visible from above five thousand feet. He said when he passed them he noted how direct and straight they were from one waterhole to another. Yet they were always following in the general direction of Colorado and Abilene, Texas, or going towards Kansas. It has been said many times that these trails are easily visible from the air, although they have not been used in more than thirty-seven years. Just kind of looks like when a man really made up his mind to go West that he went regardless of the odds against him, and God only knows that these men who started across the country had many odds against them.

East of Big Spring is the "old road" that led to Colorado where most of the lumber came from. It was shipped to Colorado by train and then on out here by oxen trains with long wagons coupled together. It had to come over hills that it would be hard to make in even a modern car and then when they got the wagon on top, the hard part of it was to get the durn oxen out of the way and let the wagon roll. One hill in particular is terribly steep and the old wagon ruts show that it must have been a dilly to try to steer some dumb oxen over, pulling a string of big-wheeled wagons. Often as many as sixteen yoke to two to four wagons, loaded with lumber, moved at the terrible speed of from three to ten miles a day. It was kind of like flying — the weather had

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a lot to do with it and if you haven't seen any West Texas steers — I'll tell you they are mighty "tempermental." The cowhands and wagon bosses carried the difference in the long whips they toted and their aim was mighty accurate. They could hit the rear of a steer twenty feet away and where it hurt most. These long whips were great "persuaders," but a steer has only two gear shifts — one low and the other backward.

After hearing all this you probably cannot imagine just how, when, and where this country got started and it has been a mystery to everyone living in it as to why he ever stopped here in the first place. It has also been a mystery to all of us who have lived here so long why we have done it.

But in the many years that I have hung out in Big Spring, I have never seen one single solitary person who ever left this country that did not want to come back as soon as he could. We haven't got any trees, we have got constant wind, very little rain, lots of prairie dogs, rattlesnakes, sage brush, and sand, and plenty of doing without things that people have in other places. The local Chamber of Commerce used to offer rewards to those who wanted to go back East after having lived here one year, and so far as I've ever known, none of the prize money was ever taken up.

Still, I've never seen a single day since I've been here, that I didn't hear somebody say, "What in the hell does anybody ever live in a country like this for?" In most cases the ones who say that are the ones who have lived here the longest, and you couldn't pry 'em loose from it with a Gatling gun. I'm wondering why someone does not explain this to me, and have wondered about this so many years that I've nearly worn my wonderer out. I feel the same way and don't understand myself.

It may be the altitude; it may be the wide, open spaces, it

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may be that our fathers were lonesome and got together more often and developed a fellowship that has lasted down the years, or it may be that the ones who came here first got together and lied to each other so much about the splendid possibilities of this, their chosen land, they were too proud to leave it. Anyway, something caused folks to like it out here, and here we are.

Big Spring in the nineties looked like the place the Lord had forgot, where the Devil had cleared out a new range to take care of the overflow from Hell. You can't say it had a consarned thing to recommend it in the way of natural gifts, except maybe the people, but I liked it then and I like it now. It looks like a bunch of other folks do too, because we keep getting more and more population all the time. Well, that's the way we are out here in Texas — kind of on the stubborn side. Get set on an idea and hell, high-water, or rattlesnakes couldn't change our minds.

Sometimes I think there is more to it than that, though it's pretty hard to explain to you if you don't know the country. When I look off toward Signal Mountain or out to the prairies and remember how it used to be — how the bald, open stretches reached for mile on mile, and the herds of antelope and wild burros and the coyotes and rattlesnakes and wolves and skunks were the principal part of the scenery (now practically all these animals have been wiped out. We still got a few skunks but they're mostly two-legged ones) — when I remember how Big Spring used to be a sleepy little cowtown, which sprawled up and down both sides of the railroad track, surrounded by a prairie wilderness with no cotton or grain or oil or anything in fact but cattle — and not enough of them unless it rained — and I look at it now — a tidy little city with skyscrapers and fine homes and stores and office buildings and even some trees we planted that are do-

## WATERHOLE

ing pretty well — it makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I had a real part in the building of America.

“Say,” this feller said, when I stopped gabbing. “That stuff’s interesting.”

“Stuff!” I said. “That ain’t stuff, that’s the truth.”

“I know,” he said. “It’s a funny thing, but you can take any little community apart and there’s more going on in it than there is in the longest novel. Now who would a thought anybody would feel the way you do about this place, away off three hundred miles from nowhere.”

It looked like I was going to have to whip this guy in spite of myself.

“I got to close up,” I told him. “Git!”

“Thanks,” he said. “Thanks for telling me.”

“Well, say,” I said. “Thanks for listening. Been wanting to get that off my chest.”

He didn’t seem like such a bad feller after all.

## 2

### PILLROLLER

**Y**ou could have knocked me over with a feather the next night, when along about ten o'clock this same feller came back in my drugstore.

"I'll take a chocolate ice cream soda," he said. "You got anything else on your chest?"

"Not as I know of," I said. "Looks like I cleaned up the matter last night. But what are you doing here. Planes are running today, aren't they?" It had been a beautiful spring day out here — the kind of spring day you only have in this part of Texas — sky high, wide and blue — and handsome. Sunlight warm and golden. Air soft as a baby's kiss. We do have nice days sometimes.

"I stayed over," he said. "Thought I ought to look around at the biggest little town in the U.S.A."

"Well, what did you think?" I asked him, busting with civic pride.

"It's a good town," he said, "but I wasn't really thinking of it. I was thinking of that other Big Spring — the one you told me about last night. All through the streets I could see the phantom horses and their phantom riders and hear the low rumble of the herds of stampeding cattle. I was back there — in that town."

I guess my mouth must have kind of fell open. "How's that?" I asked him.

## PILLROLLER

"Why don't you write a book about it?" he said.

"Who, me?" I hollered. "I'm a druggist. I'm not a writer."

"You *can* write, can't you?" he said.

"Don't know," I said. "Haven't tried it lately. I use a typewriter."

"That's fine," he said.

"Go on," I said. "I told you I was a druggist."

"Well, tell me more," he insisted, and settled himself on a stool at the fountain.

I didn't have anything else to do — it was a couple of hours before closing time — so I told him, about how it was to be a druggist.

I reckon more and funnier things happen in a little-town drugstore than anywhere. I wish I had written down some of them through the forty years I've been standing behind the prescription case or the soda fountain or some counter or other, but I never had time.

I was always too busy dispensing castor oil or soda or unnecessary advice. Right here I want to say something about castor oil. I have dished it out in every size from ten cents worth for family use to a gallon to grease a buggy and I have come to the conclusion that the only reason grown people get it down little helpless babies and children is because the kids aren't big enough to defend themselves. I can truly say (and I hope this won't hurt the castor oil business and I guess that's none too likely) that one law has been overlooked. There ought to be a law about castor oil. I have never seen any plausible reason for castor oil except to grease a buggy and the buggies are about gone now. That disposes of castor oil!

Forty years ago in Big Spring, Texas, a drugstore was a drugstore. We always bought Epsom salts, sulphur and oils

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in large quantities and had a big stock of carbon disulphide on hand for the poisoning of prairie dogs. We bottled our castor oil, turpentine, and everything else we sold in small quantities in a room at the rear of the store, and out in the backyard we put up the prairie-dog "carbon," colloquially called hi-life. This backyard joined the backyard of a saloon that served as a storage place for whiskey, which the saloon never allowed to get low. The drugstore and the saloon had a mutual "four-holer" where much deep philosophy was exchanged by drunks, and I came on many surprising facts of life while making up death for prairie dogs.

The prescription department was a sacred place and a pharmacist got to be a pharmacist by the apprentice route, which meant a certain number of hours, days, nights, and years of working in a drugstore and reading Remington's *Practice of Pharmacy* when there wasn't a customer around. By and by, the apprentice thought he knew enough and then he rode his horse down to the nearest close town when the "District Board" met. He appeared before the District Board, which was made up of some boys with frock-tailed coats and long whiskers, and took the examination. These bewhiskered fellows knew more about drugs than anybody knows these days because most of them had a degree from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy where education was mighty precise, and they put out a superior examination which required the quivering apprentice to know a lot of things about *materia medica*, chemistry, and pharmacy and a hell of a lot less than he has to know now about sandwiches.

If the apprentice passed, he put on a collar and tie and started deciphering the doctors' prescriptions behind the sacred prescription case. That was the biggest job of all, because it just doesn't seem like any doctor ever could write so you could read it.

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Of course, mistakes happened in drugstores then, just like they do infrequently now, and I remember one apprentice who had been herding cattle all his life, prior to the time, he started trying to fill a prescription. It called for a tube of pile ointment which at that time was very popular with physicians, and right next to the tubes of pile ointment on the shelf were tubes of capsium ointment (largely composed of red pepper and used as a counter-irritant). Well, our amateur druggist made a mistake and picked out the wrong tube, filled the prescription and wrote the doctor's directions on the label, "Apply to affected areas."

Maybe you can imagine the results. The patient in question, a gentleman who lived about eight blocks from the store, followed instructions. But after the first application, he came tearing down the street with the speed of a cyclone, ran straight into the store in quite a hurry, fanning the seat of his pants and yelling, "Help, I've been poisoned."

Personal drugs were not spoken of in the better circles during the nineties and when a woman came into the drug store after medicine, she sidled up to the counter and asked for a laxative in a whisper, with a deep blush encarnadining her cheek. When she up and decided to try out some patent medicine Mrs. Jones had told her about or she had read about in the paper — "After three bottles of Mrs. Lydia E. Cordonay's Elixir, I became like a new woman" — it was even worse.

This elixir usually had something to do with being pregnant or not being pregnant (it didn't really matter much because that medicine would do anything), and just invited a woman to try it. But the idea of asking for it really got her down. Finally, she would screw up her determination, put on her second-best dress and hitch up the buggy. When she



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got to the store she beckoned the druggist to the back, turned red, white, and blue.

"I — I'd like a bottle of — er — that medicine," she would whisper.

"How's that?" Practically all the men in Big Spring said, "How's that," before they ever took up the conversation.

"I disremember the name of it," she would say, lying like a dog and blushing like a posy. "Some kind of elixir."

The druggist would scratch his head.

"We got a horse liniment named elixir," he would say.

"You know what I mean," the poor female would say, "that medicine you sell to Mrs. Watkins."

"Oh, you mean Lydia E. Corderay's," the druggist would say and put her out of her misery.

Then she would go off with the bottle and hide it in the kitchen safe.

Patent medicine was a big item in those days, and I sometimes think that the mystery and difficulty a woman went through making up her mind to buy it was part of its attraction. Well, women will ask for practically anything in a drug-store these days and as far as I can tell, human nature hasn't changed much. I've got around to believing that the kind of behavior women used to have, and the easy blushes that they had on their cheeks were about as fine a job of acting as any stage could hope for. A woman blushed then because she was supposed to blush. Today they're honest — I would hate to try to make one of them blush — and as far as I'm concerned, that's all to the good. That's the way I feel about that phase of the good old days.

Blisters were very prominent therapy in that time and any muscular ache or pain was supposed to yield readily to a good

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blister. This was probably because they hurt the patient's surface to such an extent that he forgot all about his original ailment. When hot-water bottles were born, about 1900, fire insurance rates went down in the village, because the old sad iron that Mama had put in bed with you — practically always too hot because Mama was the kind of woman who never did things by halves — kept the fire department on constant vigil and the department had no horses and the water came in barrels when it rained.

When you used one of these new-fangled hot-water bottles, however, you took your life in your hands, as lots of times the durn thing would bust before you could get a chance to use it and inundate the bed with scalding water, and you too. When it did hold together, you took a chance that the affected part would get burned so bad on the outside that the pain on the inside didn't matter much. Hence the growth of the hot-water bottle. Nearly all good things are born of pain.

Forty years ago the cosmetic business was in its embryo stage. A woman who wore rouge was a bad woman and if she painted her lips, she belonged to the devil sure enough. There wasn't any real paint for lips and a lipstick was not even a gleam in a manufacturer's mind at that time. But naturally women painted their lips anyhow, by hook or crook, and a lot of them, who would have died of embarrassment if the truth ever became known, resorted to the kitchen and touched up with a little fruit coloring. The idea of selling or buying lip paint in the drugstore was unheard of. Ten cents worth of prepared chalk "with just a small tint of pink, please" would last our fair damsels for months. There were three boxed face powders on the market but they were just for the rich and modern.

Perfume came in bulk. A dime's worth would put any skunk on Main Street under the board walk and a cowhand

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with two bits worth sprinkled over his body would smell like a nigger camp meetin'. You have to keep remembering that we had very little water in West Texas then and about the only time a cowhand got to bathe was when he struck a wind-mill, and then lots of times the water was too hot or too cold; so he thought, "What's the use!" and didn't. Sometimes they



*Forty years ago the cosmetic business was in its embryo stage.*

just used Hoyt's Cologne instead. Of course, us town folks took a bath every Saturday night whether we needed it or not, in a washtub in the kitchen, with homemade lye soap, and we hardly ever needed perfume unless we were in love and went a-courting. Sometimes a girl would put a drop of vanilla flavoring behind her ear and she would smell good enough to eat.

When a woman came into our drugstore to buy perfume in those days, she had to pick it out on the basis of its reputation, as the odors of asafoetida, hi-life, sulphur, and lily of the valley, make a combination that is hard for anybody to beat. The drugstore itself had such a dark rich smell of old

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medicine, cigars, and dust, that anything like perfume didn't stand a chance. Whatever she bought always smelled much better when she got it outside in the fresh air.

We kept our perfume stock in big glass bottles and filled the little bottles on the shelf for the customers. A dollar bottle of perfume was unheard of and twenty-five cents worth was a great luxury. A cut-glass perfume bottle on a girl's dresser with a dram of carnation in it, caused all the other girls to go into fits of envy. A good, cut-glass perfume bottle cost from three to five dollars and we didn't have many of them in Big Spring.

The boys were not allowed to give perfume to their lady loves. It just wasn't proper. But the girls certainly did "give perfume" to the men and in large quantities too. They didn't know anything about the subtlety of odor. If they wore perfume they expected to smell like a rose, if not a whole acre of them.

Sachet powders came in bulk too. We sold it by the dram and put it up in a pill box — 60 grains, or a teaspoonful to you. It was very classy to have "bought" sachet in little silk, embroidered bags that the ladies made with their own fair hands to put in their handkerchief drawers or in the collar boxes of their husbands. Mostly they sewed up dried lavender off the lavender bushes in little muslin bags to put in the sheets and pillow cases. Sachet was usually a Christmas present.

There weren't any powder puffs then either, but we did a flourishing business in chamois skins which the ladies made up into fancy powder rags or "shammies." They kept these shammies in their dresser drawers to put on the prepared chalk with, and sometimes they folded the fancy ones up and put them in their pocketbooks, so you see that women have always had a yen to keep their make-up on straight, even

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when they didn't really have any make-up and used to stand in front of the mirror and pinch their cheeks to make them red. These shammyes really ought to be looked up and some of them preserved in a museum for I haven't seen one in years. The girls just took a square or oblong or round piece of chamois skin, sewed beading and ruffles of lace around the edge and ran ribbon through it. Sometimes they embroidered the edge with French knots and wrote verses on the chamois skin with ink in a fine Spencerian hand.

At first we didn't have any kind of cream. Skin was just skin but it looks like folks loved to touch it same as now. Lots of girls used vaseline for "chaps" and though they did not smell quite as good as they do now after making up for bed, they were mighty sweet. About the same amount of love and affection was floating in the breeze as we have at present. However, you couldn't prove it to a woman, and they welcomed cold cream when it got to be part of the stock.

Children didn't trade much in drugstores in those days. In fact, children could hardly be considered customers for anybody, as they rarely had any money except maybe when their long-lost uncle came home for a visit and gave them a dime or they got one for their birthday or Christmas. But they usually went with their mammas to the grocery store, especially on the day she paid the bill, as the grocer would give them a striped sack with five sticks of sugar candy as a munificent present.

But you couldn't get children into a drugstore for love or money. Everything the drugstore handled was a sickening object to them, calling up unhappy associations. Everytime the drugstore was mentioned, the kids would all bust into tears. When Mama came parading the baby buggy down the board walk, if Junior was big enough he climbed out over

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the side before she could steer the go-cart through the door, because he knew that Ma was going in after another stock of castor oil, asafoetida to tie up in a little bag and hang around his neck to keep off the measles and 'hooping cough, or for some of that yellow stuff she fed him in the spring, mixed with molasses and cream of tartar into a repulsive mess.

None of these made a milestone of delight on Junior's outlook. He hated the drugstore with its rows of colored glass bottles and an odor that would place any self-respecting skunk out of a stinking contest. Besides Junior was not allowed to loaf much then. This was before it got popular for children to express themselves. Their means of self-expression was largely concerned with carrying in wood, milking cows, cleaning up the horse lot, carrying out ashes, and studying their lessons at home under the kerosene lamps that were kept burning because Junior, with much persuasion, occasionally pointed up with a leather strap, had to keep the durn things filled with lamp oil.

As for his sister, there was no reason on earth why she would go to the drugstore as her mother never went there unless she had actual business to transact. And Sis was mighty well occupied with making a bed so you could sleep in it, shaking up feather pillows, washing the dishes and sweeping the house with a broom, shaking the rugs on the front gallery, learning to cook, sew and clean up, wash and iron, and polish the lamp chimneys with an old newspaper.

Of course, this sounds like a kind of a hard life to young people today but kids were happy in those times. They used their imaginations as much as kids do now, if not more as they didn't have many toys to play with and had to work out a lot of pretend on their own hook. They just expressed themselves naturally and it looks like most of them turned

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out all right. At least, they never thought about depending on the WPA.

The first soda fountain in our store was merely a hole in the counter. We put soda in the water, took some marble dust, and added sulphuric acid to it and that gave off the carbonic acid gas which collected in an outfit that had a little hose on it. This was connected to the drum that had the soda and water in it. This drum was "rocked" on what we called a "cradle" until the water was charged enough to taste a little like our present-day carbonated water. There was just about enough pressure to make it run up through a goose-necked tap which stood high on the counter. Many humorous explosions took place when the charge was too heavy. Sometimes when the boys lined up for a drink from the new-fangled contraption on such an occasion, they got filled so full of gas that it was dangerous to be around them. That was the real birth of the burp.

Of course soda fountains improved rapidly and by and by we had one that had a wonderful standing lamp in the middle with glass-bead fringe all around, and we even put in a few tables and some of those wire chairs which were the pride of early soda fountains and ice cream parlors, and absolutely guaranteed to give you curvature of the spine if you sat in them for any length of time. We didn't have any electric mixers but the soda man who was worth his salt could sling a milkshake three feet from one glass to another without spilling a drop. We mixed and froze our own ice cream entirely by hand. It was a mixture of gelatine, sugar, canned milk, the proper number of eggs and flavoring. We froze it just hard enough to make the freezer impossible to turn any more. I know because I furnished the arm power for turning many a freezerful. We served the customer a large saucer for a dime and we had to handpack the ice cream in ice and salt

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twice a day. If bad weather came up, we were just stuck again, that's all there was to it.

Our store was one of the first ones to import ice cream cones all the way from Dallas, and they were a great astonishment to the townfolks. Everybody wanted to try one — even the preachers — and the kids went wild. We couldn't keep them in stock.

One of the funniest things I ever saw was the time two girls came in the store from one of the squatter claims out on the edge of town. It was Saturday and the town was full of folks. These two half-grown girls had sold eggs enough to get a nickel apiece for their own and they came in the store and each asked for an ice cream cone.

They took the cones like they were scared to death of them. It was kind of pitiful — their big red hands holding on to the delicate confection.

They stood there, licking the ice cream with ecstatic swipes of their tongues, their eyes full of the wonderment of life. They licked them down to the edge of the cone but instead of crunching into the cones, they kept on licking. They made little craters down inside, and finally the last vestige of ice cream had been shoveled out by the licking method.

Then the oldest one came over to me, holding both the cones in her soiled paw. She held out the soggy looking things and said,

“Here, mister. Thank you for your holders.”

We never had any toys before 1900, but then Mr. Reagan, the man who owned the drugstore where I worked, decided to put in some holiday goods. He bought a shipment of dolls which were supposed to be unbreakable. It said so on the label. Mr. Reagan who was nothing if not enthusiastic, was



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demonstrating one of these dolls to a proud mother one day, and just to prove it was unbreakable he pitched it on the floor. The doll happened to hit the pot-bellied stove in the middle of the floor and broke into at least three hundred pieces. After that, Mr. Reagan never did believe anything he read on the outside of a box. He had been a school superintendent before he decided to make a fortune in pills. It looked so easy to see a man standing behind a counter all day and making money. But before it was over, Mr. Reagan had many rude awakenings.

Nearly everybody rolled his own cigarettes in Big Spring and Bull Durham was the principal item in our tobacco department. A Bull Durham tag hanging out of the pocket of a cowboy's shirt, was just as much a part of his clothes as his boots. Most cowmen could roll a cigarette and light it with one hand in a high wind. Ladies never smoked anything; some of them dipped snuff, but such goings-on was kept as quiet as a skeleton in a closet. "Women" sometimes smoked, but they didn't do it in public.

A "cinco" was a classy cigar and the reason it was called cinco was because it cost a nickel. *Cinco* is Mexican for five cents. The bands off of YBs and Ed Finks cigars were worth real money. As I look back, it seems to me that there was about the same amount of stinkadora in cigars then as there is now. Only certain people smoked cigars. The bankers and lawyers and big-shot railroad men, and, of course, the drummers, who always lived on the other side of their income just to make a show.

We didn't have any of the things which seem to come under the general head of sundries in the drugstore today, no pots and pans, no garden hose, no flashlights, no piles of glassware, ladies hose, hand lotion and stuff, but we did have a complete line of heavy oils and paints and a back room full

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of wallpaper, varnishes, and brushes. Also the first cameras were beginning to be available for consumers and we had these.

Early cameras were dry-plate affairs and the subject being photographed had to stand absolutely still long enough for the person taking the picture to count twenty-five very slowly, which accounts for the frozen expression you see in all photographic studies which are left from that day and age. A few Big Spring folks who were especially forward took up this new fad and some of the pictures we handled were honeys. The bustles and merry-widow hats which were the general size and shape of a wagon wheel and trimmed with everything you can think of including a bird on its nest, the big puffed sleeves and the long veils that women wore, made it impossible for more than two of them to get in one picture. The men all wore tight trousers, fancy waistcoats with fraternal emblems dangling from their watch chains and derby hats. When they went to have a picture with one of those new fangled cameras, they put on all the clothes they had and they struck attitudes to impress posterity.

Picture-taking was invariably an occasion. Some suitable spot would have to be selected and Big Spring, Moss Spring, and Signal Mountain were the favorites. It seems that the early settlers had the same capacity for showing off as we do today because we hardly ever handled an early plate picture that didn't have a six-gun on some gent's hip, sticking out of the picture like a sore thumb.

We didn't have a cash register in our drugstore, and the cash was kept in a drawer under the showcase that opened when you placed your first and third fingers on certain gadgets underneath the drawer. When you did that and pulled hard enough, then a bell would ring and the drawer would fly open — nearly every time. Of course, Mr. Reagan

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had no way of checking on the honesty of his employees but due to the fact that we all had a wholesome respect for being honest, brought on by various public demonstrations of what happens to dishonest men, there wasn't much stealing. Dishonesty just wasn't countenanced in those days, whether on the range, or in a poker game, or behind the counter.

The system of books was also very simple and about the only time the boss took much interest in the books was when he invoiced once a year. It didn't make much difference because he doubled his money on everything he sold and netted more than twenty per cent per annum on his stock where the average net is now three per cent. His operating costs were low, profits high and competition scarce. I don't know why they didn't all get rich but it looks like you never heard of a rich druggist, then or now.

A prescription clerk was usually the bookkeeper. We had no women in any kind of business in Big Spring then. "Woman's place was in the home," but that was before the girls took charge of everything but our chewing tobacco, bulked larger than we do in elections (they didn't have the vote then), and started to run men out of the bowling alleys.

Most of the bookkeeping had to be done at night, because the poor devil didn't have time during the day. Credit was a kind of a gentlemen's agreement and some of the ranchmen would let their accounts run for six months or a year or 'til roundup time and the druggist carried because he knew they would pay. A man's word was a little better than it is now, because it wasn't used so much. A ranchman sometimes just couldn't pay until it rained or until the cattle were sold or he could hit the bank for a loan.

Of course, we had some stinkers in those days as well as now. Human nature, as a whole, hardly changes and I can remember men whose kids got awful sick and the drouth

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overtook them and the store carried them, and then, as soon as the child got well and it rained, they started putting a new handle in their hammer to knock the stuffing out of the drugstore that had probably saved the kid's life. Sometimes people develop an acute case of absentmindedness about paying a drugstore bill, especially when they're not sick any more.

But by and large, people in Big Spring then tried to keep up with their obligations as well as they could, as they did all over West Texas. There was a funny story about a drugstore in one of our neighboring towns. The father of a sizeable family of boys went off to Beaumont when he heard news of the Spindletop Oil Field opening. Beaumont was a boomtown and this man was exposed to smallpox and when he got home he had smallpox and so did all his boys. Well, they all finally got well but when he asked for his bill at the drugstore, it was so big he decided to just buy the store. So he did. Those folks are in the drug business yet.

Kids were not allowed to open accounts the way they do now and they weren't allowed to charge anything on their Pa's account, so collections were much better. Nobody opened an account until he was twenty-one and making at least a dollar a day.

The drugstore has always been the chief meetingplace of the Hot Stove League, and that's the way it was with ours in Big Spring. This is probably because it opens first in the morning and closes last at night. All the male gender of the town came to the drugstore to unload their troubles and sound off their opinions. We kept an ample supply of spittoons for the heavily moustached and bearded clientele whose capacity to handle ten cents worth of "chawin'" at one mouthful was a feat, and the way one of these accomplished spitters could hit the cuspidor at five paces and make it ring, was a thing that turned a boy of my age green with envy. As

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soon as I got sixteen I tried my hand at a plug, but the results were so bad that I have never tried it since and that was a long time ago.



*The Hot Stove League*

All the political confabs were held in the store but I doubt if any of the arguments and orations that took place there had much effect on the fate of the nation. The drugstore was also the common meeting ground of all kinds of people. It looks like people are set on getting themselves into cliques or factions, no matter how few of them there are in a place. The cowboys all seemed to line up on one side or another of

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some question. Then there would be one faction in the store and a cowboy from another faction would stray in there and that would be a signal to blow out the lamps and run like hell for home because the shootin' was going to start.

Conversations often drifted onto subjects like "hoss thieves" and "rustlin'" and "They oughta been hung!" but I'll bet that some of the bewhiskered gents who were warming the stove in their dignity were once boys who accidentally got their brands on some other ranchman's calf and got a start in the world. When they got old enough to sit around our stove in the store, they always were wanting to up and purify the world and hang somebody. Also, there was 'most always some bird who was talking about the "good old days," when men were men and women were glad of it. I reckon the same story has been going the rounds since time began, because I've heard them say, "Those were the days," for forty years. I've also heard them say for forty years that the young folks are going to the devil. But nothing seems to happen. Either the young folks are not going to the devil or the devil is a damn long way off.

You didn't hear much about mob psychology in Big Spring when I was a drug clerk, but sometimes you saw a mob generate and go to work. We had mobs but we didn't have any explanation for them, except that it seemed like a wrong needed to be righted, and those men could get mighty impatient waiting for the law to take its course.

The law was a kind of a sketchy thing and it did look like enforcing it was too much of a job for a few fellows. So sometimes you would see one cowboy and then another come into the drugstore with a kind of a grave face and get to talking and then more would come and then there would be a sizeable crowd.

They were always kind of quiet men but at times like this

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the quietness was like a loud noise it was so quiet, and after a while they would all move out, slow and easy, in a body, without saying a word, and hang a horse thief. This was just a plain case of law by the brief route and there weren't any mistrials. Everybody had the goods before they started and the job was wound up mighty final and complete.

You can't do things this way now, but then, it made sense. If we had waited on the law of ours to take its course, the country would still be full of horse thieves. As it was, they were kind of scarce after a few months "operation," and we can't prove a thing to this day. Anyhow, it saved us the expense of having the county spend several thousand dollars apprehending a horse thief and trying him.

The law, unfortunately, didn't call for hanging a horse thief, but public sentiment did, and public sentiment usually seems to supersede the law. What is a law if it isn't backed by public sentiment? The job and the horse thief were always well executed in full accord with the sentiments of the most law-abiding citizens we had. It was the first use of the "suspended sentence," and every sentence was suspended very definitely. But nothing about these occasions were ever discussed by anybody, even in a drugstore where every subject is discussed. As many years as I have worked behind a drugstore counter and as many men as I have talked to, I have never heard one syllable of talk about this kind of occurrence.

Everything else was talked about. Our store and all first-class drugstores had available a supply of checkers and dominoes, and in the wintertime, men sat around and played at night, telling tales of the "Old West" that would curl your hair — stories of the great buffalo hunts and the Comanches burning their tribal fires on Signal Mountain and spying from that vantage point on the immigrant trains below, tales

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of dancing girls and gambling men and love in the pioneer days and shootin' scrapes. For the most part they were durn lies, because the men who had really seen these things and especially the ones who had been mixed up in shooting scrapes — which was one reason they were out here — never opened their chops. But it was wonderful to a boy with his ears pinned back. Many a rustler and Indian bit the dust around that stove in our store.

We also heard all the gossip in town, and knew everybody's ailments from the kind of prescriptions we filled. We knew when a woman "wasn't happy" and when a man was straying from the straight and narrow, and who got drunk on Saturday night, and when some girl had slipped. We knew about all the new babies on the way and usually were the first to hear about a wedding going to take place. It's not very different now in a good drugstore.

The "Whittlin' Crew" were all old-timers with various ailments, but they usually managed to get home in time for meals. They always met at the store each morning and the bull flew and you could hear the "experts" settle everything, just as they do now. People after they passed forty were called "the old man," and everybody said, "Sir," to them and, "Mam," to any damsel who admitted that she was fortyish (few of them did). But when the old man got past fifty, he just folded his hands and waited for the Lord. Sometimes the Lord was traveling on a slow train and failed to arrive until the old man got up to eighty-five years of age, and some of them are still alive, but they have been waitin' for the Lord just the same. I've often thought that it would have saved the community a lot of trouble if some of them had gone down the track a little piece and met the Lord. Most of these old boys had never been out of the county — had punched cows here until they lost their punch — then they gathered



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around the stove telling their stories about how good they were or listening to somebody tell how good they were.

Practical jokes, of course, were numerous. We had to make the fun that we had, but there was always an air of respect when an older person came in, and I wonder what they would think now if they could see the free and easy way that young kids have with their parents and the public in general now. But I like kids for it and I really think that they are more honest than we were, and not afraid of anything or anybody, and I glory in their spunk.

The thing that all of us old-timers have to fight, of course, is getting old before we are old enough to be old — I'd say ninety from where I sit.

Our drugstore was a general source of information and we supplied everything from a free glass of water to a midwife. We had a list of these last that were available and it was a great source of comfort to women to have one of them come out and camp in case the baby beat the doctor to the draw because the doctor was a very busy man. We took care of accidents too and revived fainting ladies with spirits of ammonia. Whenever a fellow got in the way of a bullet when the cowboys were feeling frolicksome, they just dragged him into the drugstore. We hardly ever had a dull moment.

This fact was probably what made it possible for us to work sixteen hours a day at about two and a half a day. Practically all we had to do was to open the store at 6 A.M., sweep, dust, wash windows, unpack merchandise and put it out, sell goods, fill prescriptions, keep books, listen to symptoms, kiss babies, deliver messages, and call people halfway across town to the telephone. We had a few minutes off for dinner. And at six o'clock we sometimes got to go home for supper, if the boss wasn't going some place. About once every two weeks we got a night off whether we needed it or

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not. A lot of children who had druggists for daddies in those days, used to wonder who the strange man around the house was who slept with Mama.

Well, that gives you some idea of the way the drugstore was in Big Spring, but there is a lot you can never really get on paper about a drugstore. Not much has ever been said about them in books and magazines and places but they are kind of a fountainhead of any community and practically all that happens has got some tieup with them. That was the way our store was.

"I guess it still is," this feller said.

"I don't know," I said. "Sometimes I get discouraged. Sometimes I think a town hasn't got a heart any more."

"Now there's where you're wrong," he said. "This town has a heart."

Can you imagine it! There he was boosting Big Spring to *me*.

# 3

## "SHE'S TAKEN BAD, DOC"

Well, by gum, the next night there he was again.  
"Don't tell me you want another chocolate soda!" I said.

"Sure do," he said.

"You aiming to stay on here?" I asked him. It seemed mighty funny to me a feller in such an all-fired hurry was still hanging around Big Spring three days later. Looked suspicious.

"I'm looking around," he said. "Could do worse."

It gets them all — Big Spring does.

"Well, how's the Old West tonight?" he asked me.

I handed him the soda. "How's that?"

"Let's get on with the medical profession," he said. "Tell me about some of those pioneer doctors I read so much about in books."

"They don't say half enough about them in books," I said. "You can't cut men like those men down to printed pages. They're too big for books."

"Well, give," he ordered and began to sip.

It's a funny thing what a man will do to sell a chocolate ice cream soda.

"Nobody can say too much about the doctors we had out here in those days," I began, going back in my mind over

## "SHE'S TAKEN BAD, DOC"

the heroism of those early men of medicine and what they meant to the folks they treated.

A man of the Old West hardly ever got downhearted about anything unless something happened to the woman he loved and was married to. They were a quiet, solemn kind of lot, mighty short on kissing and all that stuff women are supposed to set such store by, but I reckon they loved their wives as much as any men that ever lived, even if they rarely said so. And the woman must have known it with their woman's intuition. Anything like a divorce was unheard of and what those women went through in remote ranch houses, far from any of their kind, with the most primitive equipment for housekeeping and even for existence, was plenty. That pioneer female who once said that Texas was heaven for men and horses but hell on women and dogs, spoke a mouthful. But women stuck it out and brought up large families, one way or another. If they hadn't stuck it out, I doubt if the men would have.

I suppose women were heir to as many ailments then as they are now but they hardly ever had time to give in to any of them, except something like having pneumonia or a baby. There's nothing much you can do after you get one of these except have somebody ride hell for leather after the doc. When anything else happened to a woman she brewed up a lot of home remedies and toughed it out 'til she recovered, or if she was worn out to start with, she died. She didn't have time for hypochondria and nobody ever heard of a nervous breakdown.

When a lady twenty-five miles in the country got ready to have a baby, her husband, as frantic as any prospective papa wearing a track in today's hospital linoleum, saddled up to make a run for town and the physician. All the way he

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prayed the doctor wouldn't be at a ranch fifty miles in the opposite direction, helping another little stranger come into the world. When he came dashing up on his sweating horse, tied his steed to the hitching rack and vaulted the stairs to the doctor's office, everybody gave him room.



*"She's taken bad,  
Doc . . ."*

"She's taken bad, Doc," he would say, his chin ready to quiver and his eyes begging the medico to get a move on him. No matter how big the six gun he had on or how many children he already had, the idea of his wife suffering would reduce any six-footer to a pulp.

"Steady, boy!" the doctor would say and begin to put all his equipment into a worn black leather bag and get ready to ride, because he had to go back the same way the husband had come. We didn't have any automobiles or telephones, and a horse and buggy was too slow. The doctor rode horseback and how he could ride! In spite of that, often times when he and the miserable father got to the scene, the baby had already arrived. It seems that a baby could be born on a floor of a dugout with the same enthusiasm and dispatch that is demonstrated on our modern hospital beds, and without benefit of any anaesthesia, or anything else which is now considered fitting and proper.

Babies came in larger quantities then than they do now, and I think the quality is about the same. Many of them were capably eased into the world by cowboys who were ordinarily so bashful they ran from a girl, but there's no accounting for what people can do if they have to.

When I get to thinking about those old doctors who spent

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their lives facing blizzards, sandstorms, cyclones, burning sun, tearing wind, thirst, and hunger to assuage the pain of this raw, new country, I get a lump in my throat as big as a Parker County watermelon. We don't know anything about courage



*The doctor — and how he could ride . . .*

these days, because we've got so much to help us — so much that men have discovered and dug out and proved and passed along to us.

Doctors in those days had to practice medicine by instinct, feel and the looks of things. About all they could do was look at the patient, take his temperature and remember other patients and their ailments from long years of hard experience. They had no modern instruments, clinical laboratories, or

## "SHE'S 'TAKEN BAD, DOC"

X-rays to provide scientific information. They had to guess and then follow through on a diagnosis based largely on experience, and it was surprising how often the diagnosis was right. Anyway, the patients mostly got well and lived to a ripe old age. Hot applications, enemas, diet, and common sense accomplished wonders. Those doctors were long on common sense and intuition.

In Big Spring in the nineties, the doctor wore a frock-tailed coat, stiff collar, and starched cuffs and considered his calling sacred. His work was enough for him and that was mighty fortunate because his chances for getting rich in the doctoring business were as slim as a mesquite sapling.

"They just paid me when they could," one of them told me not long ago before he died. "I never kept any books. Just depended on God for bookkeeping."

About the best he could do was support a family and a couple of horses to carry him on his rounds and eke out enough for a new frock coat once in awhile. That frock coat was the insignia of the doctor's profession — just a part of his make-up. In the various pockets of this coat he carried an assortment of pills, tablets, and thermometers, cough drops and some horehound candy to give youngsters after a bad dose of medicine. His saddlebags reminded me of a modern woman's purse. They had everything in them which was then known to medicine, and you could about carry it in two saddlebags. They smelled like a combination of asafoetida and skunk and when Doc threw them down on the stove to dry they reeked like a wet dog.

When anybody was "taken bad," the doctor always managed to get there — no matter if it was thirty miles away with a blinding snowstorm in progress. He would strap his saddlebags on, get on his horse and plough north over trails covered with snow and ice to get to a dugout where the sick child of

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a squatter lay. A squatter was a man who was taking up land just by settling on it, and on this account his reputation was none too good in town, but that never made any difference to a doctor. Mostly these squatters lived in dugouts — a room dug in the earth on the side of a hill with some sheet iron or timbers over the top and dirt on top of that. These dugouts were really nothing more than holes in the ground, like animals make for themselves, with dirt walls, ceilings, and floors. In these hovels, which were occupied generally by a man and his wife and several children, the doctor would pass an anxious night. Most of our doctors were well educated, cultured gentlemen who had come out from the East, and what they thought of these primitive dwellings might have made interesting reading matter, but they never said. They were just interested in alleviating the pain and suffering of human beings, whether they were in dugouts or the biggest house in town.

If the illness was serious or desperate, the doctor stuck by the family and would stay for several days, without any means of communication with his own family. He stayed as long as they needed him, lived on frijoles, sowbelly, and black coffee and his presence generally kept the family going and braced them against whatever blow befell. Everybody just felt better when the doc was there, working with the patient. When he left he never knew when he would get back, if ever. Sometimes after he had been gone two or three days, his wife would send a note down to the drugstore to ask if we had heard anything from Doc. Sometimes a rider would have brought in an order for medicine or news of the sick folks and sometimes not. If we had had one of the blizzards that have made history in this part of the country, Doc would be snowbound, and oftentimes when he did get in, he would be so frozen we would have to help him down



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off his worn-out horse and thaw him out at the stove before he could talk.

Whenever I think of one of the heroes of medicine, I think of Dr. McIntyre, a man the newspapers and history books never heard of. He was a Yankee gentleman of the oldest school, born in Glengary, Canada, and educated in New York City. He came to this country and settled in Big Spring in 1883 and spent the rest of his life doing good and trying to keep anybody from knowing it. Nobody knows why he came out here to this Godforsaken spot (in those days) when he could have practiced in New York or anywhere else he had a mind to. I asked his daughter once why inarnation Doc picked on Big Spring and she said she didn't know — thought he had just heard Horace Greeley's admonition, "Go West, young man," and never could get it out of his system. After he got out here, he sure enough couldn't get it out of his system and stayed here until he died.

Dr. McIntyre was a sawed-off, wiry little character, short in stature, long on keeping his mouth shut. He tended to his own business and forced everybody else to leave his business alone. He had side-whiskers and the inevitable frock-tail coat and a heart as big as a wagon wheel — too big for his small body — but he carefully tried to conceal the fact. He was very dignified and hard to approach and was very positive in his nature. He loved boys but he didn't want them to find it out, didn't have time for foolishness and pranks, and didn't think anybody else ought to. The records of his charity are unwritten but they bulk large beside his name, wherever he is now.

Dr. McIntyre had a fine education. He used to be able to pronounce all the Latin names on the blue glass bottles in the drugstore and he knew what they were all for. In fact, there

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wasn't much about medicine he didn't know and he had that sure instinct for it which made him a valuable doctor. He helped the living with his practice of medicine and he embalmed the dead, when he had to. He never got any publicity for his charitable deeds and he never wanted any. It would have embarrassed him greatly to have his good works recognized. Like all pioneers, he fought something or somebody every minute he was awake. In his case it was mostly disease and ignorance he fought. He conquered a lot of it.

Dr. J. H. Hurt came along with the railroad. When the T & P started across these parts — it wasn't the railroad it is today — its path was no bed of roses. We had a few Indians left who still believed in personal rights and Fight for Freedom, as we call it now. A lot of railroad people got shot at and shot with guns the Indians had which had been purveyed to them by their white brothers, and there were still wild animals. Well, liberty finally prevailed over all enemies, including the deer, antelope, buffalo and Red Man, but not without stacks of bones along the track and plenty of shooting.

Dr. Hurt was the official railroad physician, employed by the T & P to patch up the men who needed attention and permitted to get whatever other trade he could out of the community. He came from Kentucky, with his pretty wife, and made his home in Big Spring. Dr. Hurt always went when he was called, no matter who called him or where, and sometimes he stayed for weeks in the ranch country, if it was necessary. He never asked questions and he never told any lies. He saw lots in his time and it went no further. He forgot the unpleasant things he saw with the same facility he forgot to collect what was due him for his work. He never charged anybody when he knew they couldn't pay him anyway, yet he always thrived and was loved by everybody in town. He never did give too much medicine — just what they needed

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and although he has been dead a long time, people are still having the prescriptions he wrote refilled. No physician can have a more impressive monument.

About the most colorful doctor we ever had was old Doctor Jones. He arrived in Big Spring on the mail hack and whence he came, nobody knows. He was a tall fellow with a scissor-tail coat and long moustaches and an ingratiating manner. He clambered off the hack and asked the whittling crew who were standing around watching the hack change horses to direct him to an eating-house.

The boys took him to the nearest chili joint and Doc Jones never climbed back on the hack. He was without luggage and didn't have much to say on his past life. The idlers around the livery stable plied him with a few questions and discovered that he was a well-educated man and an M.D. That was as much of his history as they ever learned, because it wasn't polite out here to even go that far into a man's past. It soon became apparent that in addition to being without luggage he was also without means and succeeding days brought forth the sad fact that he was addicted to the morphine habit.

But he was a likeable cuss and everybody right off got fond of him and wanted to help him start life anew. The boys rigged him up an office over the bunkhouse and got hold of a second-hand cart load of furniture for him. He never had a horse of his own — just used the livery stable horses to make his calls, day and night, year after year. Doc Jones was always able to answer a call and presentable and he was a smart doctor. He did everything he could to alleviate suffering and never asked anything in return. He was a blessing to that open range. He never did seem to need or care for money. Anyhow, he never had any. He never even had enough to buy a sign to go on his office, so the boys got some

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sheep-marking paint and painted a sign for him on the hitching rack in front of the bunkhouse. It read: "Dr. Jones — Office Upstairs." They did it for a joke at first, but after awhile, people got so they respected that sign.

One morning after he had been around Big Spring for several years, Doc Jones was missing. The boys climbed the stairs and found him very sick. They did what they could for him but in a few days, he died. Cowpunchers never had any spare cash either but they wanted to do the best they could for Doc. News traveled fast and they rounded up a bunch of people Doc had helped and gave him a decent funeral. They buried Doc on a hill out there and as they didn't have enough money to buy a tombstone, they just dug up the old hitching rack and placed it over his grave, where it stands 'til this day and reads: "Dr. Jones — Office Upstairs."



*They buried Doc on a hill . . .*

Big Spring doctors in those happy times, believed in pills and they prescribed them. We made them up in the drug-stores by hand, by forming a pill mass made of some sticky substance like a combination of gums and inert powder to give bulk. This mass held the drugs — often as many as ten to a pill — and we rolled this mass into a long thin cylinder,

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cut it in equal parts, and then pill-rolling began. We rolled each pill between our fingers and then placed the pills in a cylindrical wooden or metal cup and rotated it to give the pills uniform roundness. Then they were coated in a liquid made of sugar and water and rolled out on an oiled paper to dry.

In fact, doctors believed in drugs of all kinds and were always handling them, and so pungent were some of the mixtures of asafoetida and iodoform that doctors and druggists smelled to high heaven and you could tell when one of them came into church without looking back. Asafoetida was used to keep away diseases and though I know the doctors didn't think much of it, they never kept mothers from tying it around their children's necks in little bags to scare off scarlet fever, diphtheria, mumps, or what have you. All the kids wore these sacks and when thirty or forty of them were gathered in one schoolroom on a warm day in winter, the teacher sometimes fainted.

Quinine was widely prescribed, and while we had few malarias or fevers in this high dry climate, it was believed to be good for everything. Everybody took quinine in the winter to prevent somethin' — God only knew what. Some people just put it in their shoes. Epsom salts, camphor, sweet spirits of nitre, and well-aged whiskey were part of the doctor's dispensary. Whiskey was used for everything from snake-bite to pneumonia and it seems to be about the only nostrum we have left from that time which continues to hold its popularity. Morphine was the doctor's stand-by. It was also sold over the counter. Axel grease was a great remedy with ranchers for skin diseases but when the doctor got there, he usually advised them to wash it off and use soap and common sense and they most got cured by this route.

Grippe and epizoodiac were the common names for what

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we now call influenza. Since quinine was used for everything else, doctors thought it wouldn’t do a cold any harm, so they eared the patient down and gave him a big capsule of quinine every two hours until his head felt like it was full of brass bands and then if he kept complaining, they would stuff more quinine into him, so, of course, the patient would rather get well than take any more of that treatment, and that’s how quinine got its reputation for curing colds. The remedy was worse than the complaint, so the patient got up and went to work. That system still works, since sickness seems to be fifty per cent from the collarbone up. Besides, we don’t know what to do for colds any more now than we did then.

Hot water, castile soap, and carbolic acid were the only real antiseptics the doctor had, and the acid was used largely to put in the water for chickens who had the roup. A few people tried to get out of the world with it, but usually after a drink of carbolic they would come tearing to the doctor or the drugstore for something to stop it, having discovered they didn’t want to die in the first place. Of course, we didn’t have anything to stop it, any more than we do now, and if they got a gulp in their gullets and it got down, they died, in spite of having changed their minds about the whole thing. But most of them had just sort of smelled the cork and put on an act. Any doctor will tell you that most would-be suicides are just teasing. We have poison laws now, and when a man signs up for a bait of poison to “kill a skunk” and goes out and takes the poison himself, maybe he is right. Maybe he is killing a skunk.

Chloroform was practically the only general anaesthesia the doctor had in the early days and it wasn’t very safe, because they hadn’t then found a way to remove all the impurities. Still it saved the situation in many major operations. “Freezing” carbuncles with a spray of nitrous oxide was prevalent,

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though the frost sometimes didn't last as long as the operation and the doctor had to have help to hold the patient down while he finished.

Diphtheria was one of the scourges of children in those days and it was called every thing from membranous croup to tonsilitis. It was treated with hot bricks and mustard plasters because this was before antitoxin came into general use. There is no way of knowing the dreadful mortality rate of this disease then, as its diagnosis was often in doubt. Scarlet fever was often fatal and usually left those who got well maimed in some way. There was no serum for it and the disease just had to run its course. Smallpox ran roughshod over communities and people feared it more than anything. Quarantine was rigidly enforced and people were sent off to the pesthouse to have it out, waited on by somebody who had already recovered from the disease, and was therefore immune. Many people were pitted from smallpox and vain ones used to beg to have their hands tied so they wouldn't involuntarily scratch a pustule and come out with a scar on the nose or somewhere it showed. Vaccination for smallpox was fairly primitive but was coming into general use. The doctor gouged a hunk of meat out of your arm and poured the serum in. For about a week it made you so sick you thought you had the smallpox or maybe wished you did, but when you got well, you had a scar the size of a silver dollar and its not likely you ever had any reason for being afraid of the smallpox any more.

The theory that bad tonsils and bad teeth caused rheumatism wasn't generally known, even to doctors, and it just never occurred to anybody. We went right on to work and had quite a lot of pleasure out of telling each other about our personal rheumatism, and just died right along and our tonsils were buried with us. Lots of people have lived, died,

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and been buried in Big Spring without ever once being operated on for anything, even a wisdom tooth.

Snakebite was common among both men and horses, for the country was full of rattlesnakes. Nearly everybody had a sure-shot remedy, mostly centering around a bottle of whiskey. Of course, whiskey is likely to make you forget a snakebite which is all to the good, since most of the people who die of snakebite are scared to death. The bite of a rattlesnake is a pretty serious thing, and makes a man or an animal mighty sick. All our doctors treated snakebite the same way. They slit the wound with a knife, sucked the poison out with their lips and bound the wound up. Most ranchmen used this therapy too, when it was too far to the doctor, and when they did and tied up the wound with rags soaked in kerosene, the patient's injured member would swell up all over the place but he usually got well and was none the worse for it.

For a long time we didn't have any germs and then the germ theory got around. It scared most people to death. The first pictures we saw of germs painted them as fierce small animals that looked like a combination of a dog and an alligator, and I don't know if some of the doctors didn't get the same idea. Our doctors didn't know much about germs but fifty years before they heard of them they boiled their instruments and washed their hands before any operation, without knowing exactly why but because they knew it was important to be clean.

Earache was a common complaint but we didn't have any earache drops and the doctor usually prescribed a bag of hot salt "until it rose and broke." Tonsils were not paid any attention to and we had plain old sore throat. The doctor had us gargle gallons of hot salt water until eventually the tonsils got disgusted and recovered of their own accord.



## "SHE'S TAKEN BAD, DOC"

Doctors had to meet many emergencies out here that they are not faced with usually now. There was quite a lot of attendance on people who had got in front of a bullet or a knife and had got shot up or carved up. The Doc would probe for the bullet, put applications on the wound and keep the patient quiet if he could, though this was a hard thing to do. Anybody that got in trouble with a knife would have his wounds washed and bound up with salve and if "inflammation" didn't set in, he got well with no trouble. If it did, he sometimes lost an arm or leg.

Prior to 1900 the reading of a doctor's prescription was an art in itself. I remember one man bringing a prescription to be filled and he happened to have a laundry list from the Chinaman down the street and he handed me the wrong one. I was trying to fill the laundry list before I discovered my mistake. It didn't look much different either. And that reminds me of the Doc and the Chink. Our Chinaman came from someplace over in Louisiana and, of course, had chills and fever. The Doc gave him a hundred five-grain capsules and told him to take one four times a day until they were all gone and then to come back and get another hundred. At the end of the allotted time, the Chinaman brought back the capsules and asked for a refill. The doctor had failed to tell him to swallow the capsule.

Yep, the old doctors in Big Spring wore out many horses and rode several to death before they gave up the ghost themselves. They were hard-working, hard-driving men who had to go out to the cowlot to get a good laugh. They had a sense of humor (if they hadn't they wouldn't have been able to live through it), but they, like the preacher, weren't supposed to laugh. They were in a serious business. They rode horses everywhere except for calls up and down the railroad track when they hopped a freight or a handcar and sent the pre-

## "SHE'S TAKEN BAD, DOC"

scription back by the next train. People got as crazy scared about their home folks or themselves as they do now, and sometimes the doctor killed a good horse in a hard ride for a case that didn't have much wrong, but he never could tell until he got there.

Not much stood between the people and death but those doughty, bewhiskered old doctors and the contents of their saddlebags. They had all the nerve they needed and they knew when to use it. I am reliably advised that one of the first appendectomies ever performed in this country was undertaken by an old-time county physician, Dr. Hollis, of Abilene, twenty miles north of that city. That was the first of many and it was surprising how adept at surgery these men could be. They performed operations which were real emergencies; washed off the kitchen table, put a sheet over it; transported the patient to the improvised operating table, put the anaesthetic in the shaking hands of some member of his family and cut out the offending appendix by the light of a kerosene lamp. Either the doctor's skill or the robust constitution of the patients must have accounted for the remarkable recoveries which were made.

Our doctors were tired men with haggard faces, stiff joints from perpetual horseback riding and driving in a buggy over unbelievable trails, worn from long vigils and wonder and worry and despair at their final inability, their shoulders stooping, but about their bearing there was the quiet dignity of men who have met and conquered life and death. Most of them died broke — both in body and finances — but they carried on, as long as they could get around. Like most of the old-timers out here, they didn't really know why they carried on. It just seemed to be the thing to do. Their work was important and their work was all that mattered. It matters still, for the fruit of it is built into our modern town

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and good men they brought into the world are raising sons to carry on. Those doctors gave hostages to the future.

The feller's face looked kind of quiet and impressed.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah!"

Just remembering those old gents had brought a lump in my throat as big as a cantelope. I felt kind of weak and teary.

"I don't reckon anybody ever got sick in those days on chocolate soda, did they?" he asked me.

"Nope," I said. "They never got sick on nothing they drank."

"But they never drank chocolate soda three nights straight running," he said. "You got any bicarb?"

"Sure," I said.

So I fixed him up.

## 4

### LAW AND DISORDER

**I**t got so that every time I looked up from the prescription case along toward the shank of the evening, this feller would be standing there looking at me sort of quizzical-like, as they say in books.

"Say," I said to him, "what do you do in the day time?"

"I keep busy," he said. "I manage to keep very busy."

He was a likable cuss, kind of careless-looking. (His pants and coat hardly ever matched, but I don't know whether from poverty or on purpose, like Bing Crosby.) Still I didn't know whether I liked him pumping me that way. Got me suspicious.

"You wouldn't by any chance, be from the FBI would you?" I asked him one night.

"Why?" he came back, grinning. "You haven't done anything, have you?"

"Not lately," I said. "Not right lately."

"I guess you were quite a cut-up in the old days," he said, leading me on.

"Naw," I said. "I was small fry then, but we had a number of cut-ups here. This was a wild place all right."

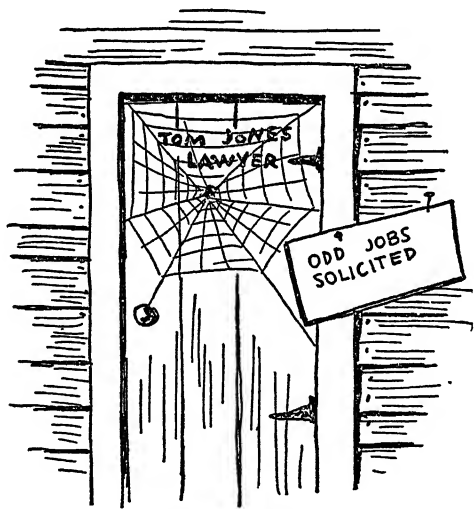
"Sure enough," he said. "You mean law-breaking was prevalent?"

"Well, we broke what we had," I said, "but that wasn't many."

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Since the time I'm talking about, folks had a lot of time to elect legislators and the legislators had a lot of time to make laws, and damn if they haven't made 'em. Life is so lawed down and regulated up that a man spends about half his time trying to obey the laws we got and the other half trying to find out what new ones have been passed since yesterday. A lot of these laws of ours are just durn fool notions too, and it is restful sometimes to remember how it was in Big Spring forty years ago.

The law was unwritten in those days. Oh, I guess there were a lot of laws written in Austin but we just never paid any attention to them or heard much about 'em. We didn't have any radios or telephones and the *Dallas News* didn't get



*Lawyers nearly starved to death . . .*

there until twenty-four or thirty-six hours after it was printed and our folks rarely got around much, so we didn't run up against much law except the natural kind which is based on the Ten Commandments. As a code, the Ten Command-

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ments never have been improved on too much. If a fellow didn't let a man's women and cattle alone, you just started out by whaling the tar out of him and then if he couldn't see reason, you had recourse to sterner methods.

Naturally we had court, but most people had a natural disinclination for getting in court. It put them out too much, so they made a habit of settling their difficulties in person, accompanied by six guns. Lawyers nearly starved to death and most of them eked out a livelihood by selling us insurance on our houses or working around the court house as county officials or doing a little ranching on the side. Anyhow, when the sheriff stepped in and cases came to court, the jury was always as bored as they are now, and if the man seemed to be justified in any way, the verdict was usually "not guilty."

In minor offenses when a man was haled before the court for some little thing like getting drunk and shooting up the chandelier in the Klondyke Saloon, it always seemed like a shame to keep a good cowhand moping in jail when he could be out working, so usually the sheriff who had arrested him or the judge who assessed the damages, made the culprit a loan of enough money to pay off his fine and the damages so he could get on back to work. They always got paid back three or four months later when it rained and the cowhand got paid. I hate to tell you, but he usually took whatever was left and got drunk again, so it was a kind of an endless cycle.

Of course, organized law and order were trying to take hold all the time but folks who was mighty used to running their own business found it was slow and irksome and interfered with the private rights of the citizens who were accustomed to settling their own accounts. True, they had elective offices, but not many people could get into town to vote — it was too far and too much trouble. A handful of citizens liv-

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ing close in, handled the politics. Even they weren't too interested. Nearly everybody objected to the new order of things and the law continued to be flexible. If a man got shot, he was just shot and there must be some reason for him getting in the way of a bullet. Besides, after he was shot, nothing much could be done about him. He was a dead issue. If he was a victim of foul play, and they wasn't any real reason for him stopping a bullet which would hold water, then his friends never failed to take the matter up with the dispatcher of the bullet and see that justice was done.

Now you may think this sounds brutal, but a lot less men got away with murder than they do now. It was far from a perfect system, but in that wide-open country where people lived close to the earth and the elements made life itself a constant battle, people hardly ever got shot unless they let one of their feet slip.

This kind of justice did give rise to feuds and there never was anything good about feuding. The last one of these little private wars we had in Big Spring, resulted in notches on many a gun handle and men were shot down on both sides of the faction. After about eight men had been killed, the idea of law seemed pretty good to everybody in town so they got to thinking the new way and hunted up the law to settle things. That's the way civilization began to seep into Big Spring, accompanied by blood and tears.

It wasn't a question of men taking the law into their own hands, so much in those days — it was just that they had their own ideas about how to act and make laws for themselves. People made it a habit to trust other people and when they found their trust was misplaced and somebody was stealing their horses, they trailed him as relentlessly as Sherlock Holmes or organized a posse to put a stop to it. As soon as

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the posse found the culprit with the goods on him (we didn't believe in circumstantial evidence), they took some very final steps which usually consisted of tying a rope over a pole, putting the noose around the horse thief's neck and leading his horse out from under him. You never hear any details of these stories and there is good reason for it. Nobody who ever witnessed one will admit it and nobody ever talks about it. This is probably not so much because they are afraid of being arrested for complicity but because men like those find the whole subject repugnant. A lynching usually grows out of mob hysteria, the contagious blood lust which men work up and assign to moral reasons. There never was anything like this about a hanging in the cow country. These were carried out with grim, cold determination — the way an official executor cuts off the life of a condemned man. Men who hung horse thieves believed that they were on the side of law and order. If they hadn't performed these distasteful duties on the dishonest, no property in that exposed country would have been safe.

This system of meting out justice put the fear of hot lead into any weak-virtued customers, so crime never made much headway in Big Spring. We had a few outlaws but they didn't last long, because as soon as we had outlaws, we had vigilantes and those boys weren't afraid of the devil. Most local disturbances were inspired by high spirits mixed with payday and strong liquor, and it was too much trouble for everybody to be running to court with such misdemeanors. Saloonkeepers took their losses philosophically and kept extra stocks of anything a bunch of rootin' tootin' cowboys might enjoy tearing up.

When anything really serious came up, there were always the Texas Rangers. The Rangers have got a reputation for courage and honesty and they've had it for a long time.



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They deserve it too, for as men and officers they have been outstanding.

When Howard County was first taken away from the Indians, and the pioneers saw fit to run their cattle or someone else's cattle over this vast expanse of nothing, it was necessary to have an army of some kind to subdue the Indians or turn it back to them. The Texas Rangers was an organized body of men who were selected to carry this work on and expanded from just "Indian scrappers" to a well-respected, law-enforcing body that took over all situations that were too big for the individuals to handle in their own way, whether it was Indians or organized bands of horse or cattle thieves.

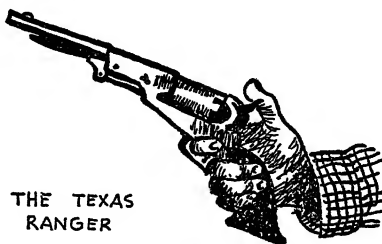
These men were selected because they could cope with any situation and seemed to like it. They had no red tape but went to the root of things quickly, quietly, and had only one order, "get your man or men." Sometimes it took a few minutes, sometimes it took a year, but they did the job.

I've seen Rangers work in groups at different times — they seemed to come from nowhere, did their job, and went their way. They patrolled all along the border, about three hundred to three hundred and fifty miles south of Big Spring, yet when any emergency arose here, they seemed to be mighty close. They came to town, established a new order of things and any bad boys around these parts stayed at home while they were here. The "tough hombres" on the ranches stayed at home too. In fact you could feel the presence of the Rangers shortly after they arrived without even seeing one. The saloons were as quiet as a village church. The cowhands who were accustomed to come to town to yelp a little, were very conspicuous by their absence. Only in rare instances did the Rangers take charge. When they did, it was a very pure atmosphere that pervaded these parts for these tall, tough boys carried their guns unstrapped, ready for action, and

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when they said, "Come," that's what they meant. Those who didn't come were usually attended to by the local undertaker.

Rangers didn't talk; they acted. No one with any horse sense at all ever argued with them, because they shot first and explained afterwards. They were keen judges of human nature. They dealt only with situations that were difficult and with men who were tough, hence the mortality rate amongst the "tough ones" got to be so high that it was much safer to be good.



*Rangers didn't talk; they acted.*

A deputy sheriff in Big Spring got off of his "sworn duty" one night and got into a crap game with a gang of Negroes. He must have won, anyhow the deputy was killed by a half-witted Negro and the boys in town took the law into their own hands. The Sheriff managed to get the Negro out of town before they got him, and the next afternoon, all Negroes were ordered out of Big Spring.

"Don't let the sun go down on your heads here tonight," was the slogan, and although the exodus reminded me a lot of the exile of the Acadians, it was carried out to a letter. The next morning we didn't have a single Negro left in Big Spring and things looked kind of rough. Quickly and quietly a couple of Rangers came and stood around the streets a couple of days, saying nothing, seeing all, and things rapidly got back to normal. It was years before the Negroes came back to Big Spring.

Texas Rangers were organized in companies, about fifteen to twenty men to each company, the only officer in the company was their captain; they had no superior officers except

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the captain. He gave the orders, told them what to do, and they did it. They were the judge, the jury, and the whole shebang. It was a very economical setup, the main expense being the funerals of the deceased man or men as the case might be. They shot only when they were right and shot right when they did shoot. They could ride fifty or sixty miles in a day and get there that night in time to do the job and move on.

The story went the rounds back yonder, about a county judge wiring the governor to send a company of the state militia to cope with a situation that existed, where some of the boys got kind of playful with their bricks and the local authorities thought it was a little too big for them to handle. The governor wired back that he couldn't send the militia at that time. The County Judge sent the following telegram, "IF YOU CAN'T SEND A COMPANY OF MILITIA (STOP) SEND THREE TEXAS RANGERS."

Elections were pretty simple affairs, as everybody in Big Spring was a Democrat. We didn't have more than three Republicans in the county and nobody had ever heard of any other party 'til the Bull Moose came along. We let the Republicans hang around, not because we could understand why anybody with a grain of sense would be a Republican or because we liked them personally, but just to show we were democratic. There wasn't any use having a general election. We just decided in the primaries who was going to be what. Sometimes there would be considerable fireworks in a sheriff's election and most of us were in the celebrating mood when Cleveland got elected President of the United States, but aside from that, elections didn't come to much.

Our county officers were usually noted for something besides the job they held. Judge John B. Littler and his wife

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were Angels of Mercy in every sick room around the country. They nursed all the sick folks free and never got anything out of it but the satisfaction people get out of goods works. For many years, they went night and day, whenever anybody needed them, doing whatever they could. They came west from Ohio in 1891 and once when I asked Judge why he and his pretty wife came out here, he said, "Damn if I know, but I sure am glad we did."

Judge Littler is still living today. He's not a rich man and his eyesight is gone, but he has his memories and they make him richer than any kind of fame or money. I don't know as Judge Littler ever had any public account taken of his manifold charities, and I do hope he will some day, somehow learn that many who have gone before did appreciate him and Mrs. Littler and value what they did, even if they never got around to telling him. Judge was a judge, but he was largely concerned with that first law about being your brother's keeper.

Our county treasurer was a right important official, seeing as how he managed the purse strings. He was an old-time physician and kept his office in the court house. He was a great character and a gentleman of the old school, and always managed to maintain his equilibrium until some traveling band or circus played "Dixie" and then he threw his hat away and gave a rebel yell that startled the coyotes.

His office was the official domino parlor of the court house and the Court House Boys played all day long — or at least until something happened, like a baby case for the combination treasurer and doctor or a shootin' to be stopped by the sheriff and his deputies. These life and death matters were the only things that ever really disturbed a court house domino game.

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Building the first jail in Big Spring was merely a matter of form. Every more or less organized community was supposed to have one and though nobody wanted one we had it. It was entirely too small to hold those who were entitled to inhabit it, and it was too much trouble to get it occupied. In fact, it was hard to put one's best friends in jail, when the Law had been drinking with him, and their capacity was just a little less than that of the Law. Hence, the story about a mesquite bush growing up by the jail door until it was a big tree, before the door needed to be opened for a customer, was really true in a county south of here. They had to hold a prisoner several hours while they sawed down, or dug up, that durn mesquite.

The jail here was used more because there happened to be more folks who drank worse stuff. Our first calaboose, according to tradition, was a flimsy affair, being made out of lumber, with a padlock and chain on the door. According to good authority, one old cowboy was put in there one night while drunk, and next morning he couldn't rouse anybody so he just took off his boot and beat off boards enough to get out to get water. Then he went to the wagonyard, got his horse, and beat it back to the ranch. No charge was filed against him because the law didn't remember his name and the horse couldn't talk. Probably it was months before he came in for another shot of hootch anyway, and it might have been around election time. They were elected then, as now, on a new deal of tolerance towards the other man's sins.

When the first folks came out here, the county didn't have enough money to build a court house or jail, because aside from the school land and the land that the state gave the T & P Railroad to take a chance out here, we didn't have anything that really belonged to anyone except the hat that he had on his head, what few clothes he had, and a horse.

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We didn't have any bond issues and couldn't buy, beg, or steal anything from anyone except ourselves. The only thing that anybody had that the other fellow wanted was his horse. You have already heard of "hoss thief treatment" but I'll repeat this much: when one was caught, he had to have a mighty flexible neck to live long.

As we got more civilized and culture set in, we naturally had to have larger and more secure jails, court houses, and things where folks could "run for office" to spend other folks' money. Our imagination didn't work like it does in the 1940's. We really believed that a man ought to buy what he could pay for, which shows how primitive we were.

Then we had the thing called leisure that came along. You can guess exactly what that did to things. It gave the cowhands too much time to spend in town, and town always was bad for cowhands. Then, of course, the jail was pretty nice, so the boys sobered up there at county expense, instead of in the sandpiles, sleeping along with the white sow.

Our law enforcement, in an official capacity, consisted entirely of one sheriff and a deputy. But of course, these were backed up by posses, vigilantes, and the Texas Rangers if there was any call for it. All in all, I would say that the crime ratio, based on the population at that time, was about one tenth what it is today, probably because folks were busier than they are now and ladies didn't drink. They stayed home and got their husbands hot meals without the assistance of three or four colored folks working around the house, regardless of the size of the family.

There is something to be said for that unwritten kind of law, based on the understanding of the other man's rights and his ability to enforce those rights. A man hardly needed a law to keep him straight. His reputation soon spread over the country by some unknown means and he was isolated or

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accepted according to his standing in the community and the bank, and his ability to hold his own. I sometimes wonder whether strong men produced these rules or whether these rules produced strong men. Anyhow, we had strong men and their law was simple and anybody could understand it, and everybody did.

"I guess you don't have any necktie parties out here any more do you?" the feller said.

"No," I said. "Nobody feels any call to steal horses these days. It's too hard to find one."

"How crimes have changed," he said and yawned.

# 5

## SADDLEBAG PARSONS

**I**t was one Sunday we got to talking about preachers. Big Spring is kind of quiet on Sunday afternoon. Everybody goes home from church and has roast chicken and mashed potatoes and angel cake and hand-turned ice cream and then, stupefied with food, goes sound asleep among the Sunday papers, until it comes time to go riding.

I was down at the store working on the books. No rest for the druggist.

My friend came in and had a chocolate soda.

"Didn't you have any dinner?" I asked him.

"I just had breakfast," he said. "I don't have dinner til dinnertime."

"Sunday dinnertime is one o'clock," I told him.

"Oh," he said, and then he went on. "What do people do here on Sunday?"

"The usual thing," I said. "Sunday school and church and dinner and snooze and go riding in the car."

"Did they go to church then?" he asked me dreamily.

"When?"

"You know — way back when."

"Oh," I said. "Back yonder. Not all of them. But some did."

"What were they like?"

"Who?"



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"The preachers."

I tried to remember.

The preachers had kind of a hard row to hoe in Big Spring, because it looked like the really interesting people was the kind that hung out in the saloon and not the church, and the parsons' flocks of strait-laced, God-fearing folks always looked like they was weaned on a pickle and tried to make the preacher look the same way. Sometimes when I used to see a preacher hovering on the edge of the gang around the stove in the drugstore, wearing his long black coat and his dignity, I felt kind of sorry for him and wondered how much he would give for a real good, way-down-deep belly laugh. His congregation didn't put up with anything as coarse as that from the minister, so he went around looking slightly like he smelled something bad. That was because his God was too serious.

Church-going folks were liable to be more sot in their ways than anybody and stubborn as an old mule, and they believed the preacher was supposed to live above and away from sin. My idea is that he ought to live right in the big middle of it if he expects to snatch any brands from the burning. They could have done much more good if they had lived with sinners and brought them out of it, but for some reason, their congregations had them buffaloed.

No, the boys who preached back yonder didn't really have much fun. In fact, if you will pardon the expression when applied to the preacher, they had a hell of a time. Nobody paid them any mind until they got in trouble, but if they got sick or looked like they were going to die, they started scraping around to find a preacher. Or if one of the boys in a family was mixed up in shady business or the daughter of the house had been sneaking out at night to meet a man, then the

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minister was supposed to come and give them a good stiff talking to. In fact, when things got just as bad as they could possibly be, the preacher was thought of first. And I reckon he still is.

But the ministers of that time had their own compensations. They had a well-developed picture of heaven, with gold streets flowing in milk and honey, and they believed in fire and brimstone and knew everybody was going to get his just deserts up yonder. Some of the greatest men of the Old West were the circuit riders who carried the gospel in their saddlebags and rode off into the remotest and most isolated prairie fastnesses to check up on the salvation of the human beings who lived out there amid the sandstorms and brush, to marry them, to christen their babies, to comfort the sick and the dying. Most of these preachers were a gentler stripe than the average inhabitant of our region and when they got lost in the brush up north of here, they must have thought they had reached the end of the world. They took the medicine of Faith they preached or they couldn't have stuck it out.

Preachers, then as now, visited the sick and helped the needy and never could keep any of the measly little salary they got paid, for giving it to somebody who was worse off than they were. Most of them that lived here in town never did even have a horse, weren't able to afford it, and a man without a horse in Big Spring was really in a bad way. The livery stable usually lent the preacher a horse and buggy or a horse to ride, and no place was too far away and dangerous to get to and no man was too humble or too depraved for the preacher to ignore if he was sick or in trouble. They braved all kinds of weather to carry medicine and food and fuel to dugouts way out on homesteaded claims, and I doubt if some of the people who benefited from these attentions ever set foot in the church.

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I remember one parson we had who was mightily looked down on by his congregation for a little thing that happened. One of the few Negroes in our town got terribly sick and there wasn't anybody to take care of him, so the parson went down to this Negro's hovel and sat up with him day and night and paid for all his medicine until the Negro passed on. That struck me as a practical application of what I thought was religion, and still do, though I don't claim to be an authority on such matters.

The preachers always looked hungry. Preachers are kind of a hungry set of men anyhow and I guess this is because they never quite got filled up since they heard the call and started studying for the ministry. Anyhow, I know whenever we had them home to dinner, they would about eat us out. I knew one man said his Pa was a Baptist deacon and they had a Baptist preacher for dinner every Sunday of his boyhood. That man said he grew up thinking that chickens were composed entirely of wings and necks because by the time he got to the second table, that's all there ever was left. But man, a preacher could sure eat, and if he happened to have his family along — they always had families of seven or eight kids — they could lay waste a beef.

We had camp meetings every summer out east of town



*We had camp meetings under a brush arbor . . .*

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under a big brush arbor and everybody in Big Spring went. It wasn't fitten if you didn't. It used to make some of the young folks who wanted to take their supper over to Signal Mountain on a moonlight night mad as thunder because their folks wouldn't let them go due to the fact a revival was in progress. Even if you didn't need salvation you were not supposed to be doing anything except helping the other fellow to get it. Some families didn't give a rap if their kids had a moonlight picnic except for what people would say about social affairs during a revival. Since the three churches managed to keep one going on nearly all summer, the young folks didn't have a chance, but probably this very fact kept them out of a lot of trouble.

People came from way up on the prairies to our camp meetings and cow outfits sometimes rode in. When we had all-day-meetings-and-dinner-on-the-ground and camp meetings we would have a big picnic spread and all the women in town would try to outdo each other with what they had cooked up. Some of those church women sure could cook. Sometimes we would barbecue a calf and that certainly was good eating.

Preaching at these camp meetings would hit a pitch of emotionalism and fervor which was probably very good for our citizens, especially the ones that lived on lonely mesas all year and just kept penning their emotions up. They could really let them out in camp meeting in the singing, and the praying had the amen corner. Sometimes we would have a visiting parson who was specially trained for soul-snatching, and he would get so worked up that he would practically froth at the mouth, lose his voice, get hoarse from shouting and throw things.

Once I saw one of these preachers knock his watch off the pulpit and jump down on it — carried away, that's all. They

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would play on their audience like a man playing on a fiddle — wild and violent, then tender and pleading, then soothing and serene. They would resort to all kinds of devices to get the lagging sinner to come. They would ask the saved in the audience to move among the unsaved and speak to them in accents clear. They would ask everybody who was saved to hold up his hand in order to make those who were still lost sheep aware of it. This business was more embarrassing than anything else and while a lot of people stumbled to the altar by these means just to get rid of the stigma, as soon as the special revivalist left town they became backsliders and started shooting up the Klondyke again.

One old drunk cowhand went to a camp meeting and got religion every night. When they would call for mourners, this old waddie would stagger down the aisle to the mourner's bench where he would howl like a lone wolf.

After about six nights of this and Old Bill was disturbing the regular process of saving souls, the preacher said to him, "Now Bill, you were down here last night and the night before and six nights before that. So now you just sit down here and be quiet while we pray."

Bill wasn't in the praying mood. He just looked at the parson and said, "Pray, hell! Let's stand up and sing!"

We liked our regular preachers better than we did the special revival snorters, although these last did give us something to talk about, and if they were young and good-looking, the girls got quite a ripple out of them. They would rend the air for three weeks with their sermons on hell fire and brimstone but as soon as they got out of town, we usually forgot all about them.

Our local preachers' children usually had biblical names. One parson preached here once, had a boy called Nebuchad-

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nezzar. I don't know whether he had run out of names or if he really liked the name of Nebuchadnezzar. It was all right if it suited the parson and his son, but it didn't happen to suit his son and all the kids had a mighty fine time over it.

Sometimes I think that's why preachers' boys get a reputation for being tough hombres. They have to put up with so much nagging and kidding by other boys, and are always taught to turn the other cheek. By and by, they see that is not getting them anywhere and develop such a strong right punch that they are regarded as bad. Anybody else that did that would be a hero, but the preacher's son is supposed to be a milquetoast. However, they hardly ever are.

I don't know how some of our preachers that had eight or nine children made out, especially in the winter when everybody was pinched. Coal was hard to get and had to be hauled over two hundred and fifty miles of uncertain railroad, and the mesquite wood that was available was soon used up. Regardless of the number of kids on the place, everybody had to go in one room after the fire died down in the kitchen. They must not have had standing room at the parsons' houses. But preachers apparently believe that the Lord will provide and sure enough I never heard of any of them or their families who died of cold or starvation. They managed to make out.

Mild as our preachers had to make themselves, they all really had guts. I knew one preacher who heard that a man had passed a remark about him that he didn't care for in an eating-house. The preacher cornered the fellow and told him he had to take it back, that it was a lie and he knew it. This great big burly beef of a man just wilted down and the preacher gave him a paper to sign and he signed it. The preacher didn't hit him, he just told him he could swear he'd lied and though passing the lie was one of the worst insults you could give a guy in those days, this bully knew he was in

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the wrong. If he hadn't signed the paper, I believe the preacher would have knocked the tar out of him, in spite of being a man of peace. There's a limit to all things.

While our church-going was irregular, we did have a religion of sorts in Big Spring. It was an unwritten religion on the order of the unwritten law, and as concerned mostly with being considerate to the other fellow, giving help when it was needed, living honest and clean, and the like. The Bible was used extensively in homes then, where now if you picked up a Bible in a living room and read two or three verses, most of the members of your family circle would yawn and turn on the radio and get some of that new music, which does not fit in at all well with anything I've heard said of in the Bible.

But then men read the Bible and they believed as much as they understood and they read it out loud to their children. If you read the Bible out loud you will soon find out that for literature, it hasn't got many parallels in the English language. It is good reading matter. We sold a lot of Bibles at the drugstore — they were a standard item — and the Bible was the only book in many of those pioneer homes. It served not only as a library but as a hall of records as all the vital statistics of the family were written in it, since it was a safe place. The worst drunkard and the worst gambler and the worst man in town, all wanted their children to have a Bible around and read it. It's a funny thing about characters like that. They are specially particular of their children. The Bible is still the best-selling book in American drugstores and bookstores and whenever that ceases to be the case, it is time for us to really start worrying about America going to the dogs.

Well, the sky pilots with the long coat and the whiskers and the sanctimonious look have been streamlined along with

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doctors, school teachers, and everything else. It's nothing unusual now to see the minister out playing golf with the worst reprobate in town, and I don't know but that I like that. When you play golf with a man, you get close to him and if you are going to win him back from perdition, you got to get close to him first. For the minister to be playing with a bad hombre is a good application of the things they teach, and if preachers can live a normal life it will result in more capable men being called to a profession which is still about as important as any in the community. People now don't expect the minister to carry them to heaven, the way he used to, but they know or ought to, that he is trying to sell them a bill of goods that is good for them. If they don't take it, they lose, not the preacher.

The preachers we have now are a lot more human breed. Any parson who is a golfer will appreciate what one of our preachers said here while his prairie croquet was giving him a bad afternoon. He kept missing his shots and getting hot under the collar. Finally he just busted out with a big, furious, "Clay Read!" Of course that doesn't make sense to you until you know that it was the name of a new dam which had just been completed near here. It didn't make sense to his partner either.

"What do you mean, 'Clay Read?'" his friend asked him.

"That's the biggest dam in West Texas," the preacher answered.

I've often felt the same way, but I didn't need any synonym.

Our preachers in the old days, were hard-worked, little-rewarded men. In any emergency they were sent for, from a saloon knifing to comforting one of the unfortunate daughters of Eve who did business over the gambling joint, in her last extremity, and they kept their mouths shut. The preacher



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was a general public utility and everytime anybody got in trouble he threw a saddle over a horse and rode after the preacher, when before he got in trouble, he probably hadn't thought of the man for years.

They buried our dead. Men that got married by the justice of peace and let their children go without being christened and never went to church at all, somehow wanted a preacher when any of his started on that long journey to a bourne from which no traveler returns. This was one time when you just had to have a preacher.

Funerals in those days were a kind of terrifying thing. Nothing was well-oiled and smooth and easy running about funerals the way it is now. Everything was stark and raw and harsh. When people died, the neighbors went in and took turns sitting up with the corpse and other menfolks knocked together pine coffins if the family was poor — if they had money they bought a coffin at the furniture store — and then they went out and dug the grave in the barren cemetery. And the preacher was there all the time. When he preached he said everything good he could think about the corpse, even if the departed had been a regular old skunk while alive. The preacher never let the family down. Then the little procession of hacks and buggies would wind over the hill and the sweating pallbearers had to lower the coffin in the grave by hand and throw the hard clods down on the top of it. There were hardly any flowers at all, but sometimes if it was summer, we put branches of mesquite over the grave. It is green and kind of feathery, and it looked right pretty.

If it hadn't been for the preacher in times like this, I don't know what we would have done.

We had as much Religion in spots, I reckon, as they have today, but it was a fur piece to church. Kind of had to practice each day a little, doing charitable stuff such as tending

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the sick man's cattle, sittin' up with the boys whose horse had stepped in a prairie dog hole, or lettin' the Missy go over to the Caruth place and take care of the woman and kids for a couple of weeks after the new baby had come, while our outfit batched. Got lonesome, too, for the folks cause the Caruth's lived thirty miles over yonder.

Remember one case where a pious sister approached a well-cargoed cowhand and said, "What are you going to do when you approach the Lord with whiskey on your breath?"

The old boy looked up and said, "Lady, when I approach the Lord, I'm going to leave my breath here."

The women were the church workers (same as they are now). It seems like having children and handling religion is always left to the women.

Mr. and Mrs. Morrison loved and lived their religion, and are still here and working at it. They don't make much noise but I note that they have a church named after Kate Morrison across the track in the Mexican quarter.

Don't know what the results will be in comparing these two ways of practicing religion — but if it wasn't against religious principles, I'd like to place a little bet.

"You don't know of any place I could get dinner on the grounds now, do you?" He said. "I'm beginning to feel hungry for a chicken cooked by a good, religious woman."

"Come on up to the house," I said. "Might be a drumstick left over."

"Much obliged," he said, "but I've got to see a man about a piece of work. Good-by."

And he went off grinning. I couldn't make that one out — not then.

## 6

### NAME YOUR PIZEN

“**Y**ou never did tell me about those dens of iniquity — the saloons,” my friend said one day, looking at his empty soda glass sourly. “You don’t seem to be bothered with them now.”

“Naw,” I said. “We got civilized here in Texas and put in local option. That just serves to make the whole thing more attractive.”

“Wasn’t it attractive then?” he asked.

“Sure it was,” I said, “but it was nice and simple — kind of uncomplicated. Shortest distance between two points. If a man felt like getting drunk, nothing stopped him, unless it was lack of money. He just stepped up to the bar.”

I reckon you know what “Name Your Pizen,” means. It’s what the barkeeps used to say to the men that lined up in front of the bar in the old-fashioned saloons and looked thirsty. However, it didn’t have many answers. Usually it meant bourbon or rye, and I’ll bet one of those smooth-faced old bartenders in a white apron and his shirt sleeves rolled up with elastic garters around them, would have dropped dead if any cowboy had named a Dry Martini. They never heard of such a thing. They also didn’t have any truck with Scotch highballs, or that concoction which is composed of whiskey and miscellaneous dosage including red cherries that

## NAME YOUR PIZEN

we call an Old-fashioned. I don't know what's old-fashioned about it. Never heard of it in my day!

No sir. The pizen was real undiluted stuff — the straight road to ruin, without being loaded down with any blandishments in the shape of stuffed olives or fizz water, and since we didn't have enough ice to keep the milk and butter sweet, we certainly wouldn't waste it throwing it into a glass of liquor, besides which it would ruin the liquor. A drink was a drink. The bartender just took the bottle off the backbar and poured three fingers in a glass and the customer threw it down without a thing to chase it but the pleasant memory.

What did men drink? This question has been asked me in many places. They drank whatever they could afford. They spent all they had for food and liquor. Some of them didn't drink at all. Most of them did. Beer was used during the drouths. Whiskey was patronized when the ground was wet — that was when they got paid. Those who did drink made everybody think that everybody was drinking, they made so much noise. They would try to throw a rope on everything that was loose, even to the smokestack on a locomotive. They liked whiskey.

Some old fellows had what they called hot toddies, which was whiskey with a dash of hot water and they favored a cough syrup made out of rye whiskey and rock candy, but those were for the old and weak. Men in Big Spring took their whiskey straight until it took them.

Course, my information on this subject, namely, saloons, gambling dens, and other emporiums devoted to major and minor vice, is not what it ought to be. Looks like these are the things in life a man forgets first, which makes it mighty outstanding that they're not very important in the building up of a country — just a kind of a waste of time. Not that I felt this way in the nineties, but in the nineties, I was a

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minor and barkeeps turned out to be awfully particular about minors. Them that didn't have a germ of human decency about introducing a boy to the ways of iniquity knew there was a law against selling hard liquor to the very young.

We had four times as many saloons as any other type of merchandising business in Big Spring and they were all



*We had four times as many saloons as . . .*

powerful popular, especially on Saturday night and payday, when a ranch hand didn't think a thing of riding twenty miles to town to throw around his competence — rarely more than a dollar a day for thirty days — on raw whiskey and card and dice games. It's always astounding how a man will work like a dog for thirty days to get money to burn up in one night.

The Big Spring bars then didn't have much in common with these slick places that pass for saloons now and go by

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the name of cocktail lounges. If one of those cowboys had got a load on in some of these de luxe emporiums, all got up with zebra-skin seats and spotted leopard upholstery he would have thought right off that he had the delirium tremens. The decor of a Big Spring saloon was simple. It was composed mostly of bar all across one end decorated with whiskey bottles and a long brass rail for the punchers to hook their boot heels over. Later on in the evening the brass rail for their boot heels helped some of them to stand up. Saloons were lighted with kerosene hanging lamps and any artistic notes introduced consisted of a picture of a nude lady over the bar or a handsome lithograph of Custer's Last Stand with Indians biting the dust all over the place.

Both of these examples of pictorial beauty were fascinating to me and I used to pass and repass the swinging doors hoping to get a full look at them. But the swinging doors were too efficient. They always worked like they were on steel springs. You could look under them and see a long line of legs with boots and spurs hanging around the bar and over the top you could see a bunch of big hats, but you could hardly ever see the nude lady or Custer's Last Stand.

Fred Korn had the saloon next to the drugstore. If you were shaved, boots shined and had bathed in some reasonable time during the past couple or three weeks, you would be found frequenting Fred Korn's. It was a gentlemen's hangout, quiet, subdued, and with an air about it that suggested that maybe you were doing the bartender a favor when you placed one foot on the rail and asked for a drink of whiskey straight. What you got was whiskey — the best whiskey — in fact, not many men ever left Fred Korn's place under someone else's power. In the first place Fred's attitude made you kind of ashamed if you got too much, and you felt like you would have had you belched in church, and that

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maybe you had come to the wrong place. Anyway, although I was raised in the same backyard as his saloon, I didn't see many who got too much while Fred was running the place.

Fred was one of these quiet, kindly men, tall with gray hair and, of course, a gray mustache, but the striking thing about Fred was his steel gray eyes. They not only saw through you but they saw through the wall behind you. He catered to none except the best and he threw out those who couldn't qualify. He had plenty of bartenders who had the horsepower to accomplish nearly anything that would be needed. But I never heard of a pistol being used at Fred Korn's.

The building was a two-story affair with steps leading upstairs from both the inside and the outside. It had varied entertainments upstairs, but it was usually gambling from what I've heard. I never made the steps. I was a kid.

Downstairs was a bar, possibly fifty feet long, of the finest polished woods. It was about three and a half feet wide and five feet high, but around it was a rail that the short ones could stand on to get their nourishment. The lights were hanging chandeliers, as fine as you will find anywhere except they burned lamp oil. As well as I remember there were five of these lights. With four or five lamps to each outfit. Anyhow you could see what you were getting.

Chairs lined the wall opposite the bar. These chairs were deep-seated, individual chairs, about thirty in all. Fred Korn's had no pool tables if I remember correctly. Across the front, the windows were covered with a grating to keep the horses from backing through the windows when they got on the sidewalks when the weather was bad.

In the front end sat Fred, quietly discussing things as they came, placing the boys' guns on the shelf as they checked in, taking care of the money that they wanted to take home with

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them, seeing that their horses were taken care of after they had visited other places and got too much. In one corner of the saloon was a barber shop so that those who wanted an excuse, but whose religion didn't tolerate drinking, could come through the barber shop into the saloon and leave via the barber shop again — a very neat arrangement.

Fred's office was about ten feet long, cut off from the back of the saloon with a wooden grill, so that those who passed couldn't see who was getting a drink. The place was as cool and composed as the supreme court.

Fred's bartenders were the quiet type, silent and efficient. If an argument ensued, which did happen at times, the man who started the argument usually landed in the back yard and he didn't land on his feet or head.

During the winter months Fred's place had two pot-bellied stoves that assisted the stuff the customers had inside to thaw up the outside. The conversations were never long or loud around the stoves.

Negro porters kept the tables scrubbed. The cigarettes were handmade and lots of spilling took place between the hand and the lip, so the porter was kept busy sweeping up the makings that had missed the cigarette paper.

The price of a drink was usually fifteen cents. Polite drinking was the vogue at this place. The slogan, "Line up and take one on me," was never heard much, it wasn't a place where anyone would gang up.

The man I worked for at that time, Mr. Reagan, was a rabid hater of whiskey. He always said that Fred Korn was one of the finest men he ever knew but he also added each time that it was a shame that Fred sold whiskey.

The chinaberry trees, the hitching rack in front, and a board walk were about the only decorations outside. I believe that times when the wind didn't blow too hard he had a



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front light that he tried to keep burning just in case some mariner got lost in the storm.

George Brown's place sold beer only. It was across the street. Draft beer was in order — "big 'uns" for ten cents, "little 'uns" for a nickel — but it was beer, just beer, no hard stuff at that place. In front of the place was the sloping board walk and on the edge of the walk was a bunch of empty kegs that the loafers used for chairs.

The bar was twenty feet long, with an enormous ice box behind it, where the kegs of beer were covered with ice. The nickel boys kept the place busy, as it was very democratic. It's a lot easier being democratic with nickel drinks than with fifteen cent 'uns.

George Brown was a good-natured German. He contributed to everything. It has been whispered around for many years that George contributed to several preachers who didn't ever know where the money came from. He was like that. He sent me home too on bad nights after buying my bundle of papers to keep me off the streets.

A genial Irishman named Mike Mollette ran the saloon on the corner right next to the depot. Mike was a typical Irishman. He wanted peace and would fight for it if necessary. He left here when the town went dry. He also contributed to everything and did no one any harm. He assisted everybody who was in trouble.

So it goes, the rougher their business was the bigger their hearts. We had a lot of saloon men, all were charitable; and it seems to me that somewhere I've read, "And the greatest of these is charity."

One man who ran a saloon was a Civil War veteran. He had left an arm on one of the battlefields for the Lost Cause. He would never let me peddle papers in his place; said it wasn't any place for a kid or a lady.

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Another saloon man got mad at the sheriff and said he was going to kill him. That day the sheriff took two guns away from him. He made more war talk and that night the sheriff shot him from across the street after the saloon man had "drawed first."

I saw that. It was a neat job for a man shooting across the street on a busy evening. It went through the saloon man and embedded itself in a bar not far from a boy's legs who was wetting his whistle there. But the boy moved his legs away right fast. In fact, he was pale but running several hours later.

The saloon man was buried a few days later. The Sheriff told me after I was grown that he hated to do that killing mighty bad.

The old saloon was colorful and it's a shame that more pictures of them have not been preserved. The bartenders in all of the places were just what their environment demanded. Tough places had tough hombres dishing out the juice. The juice was tough and made them tough, but in most instances the bartender never drank.

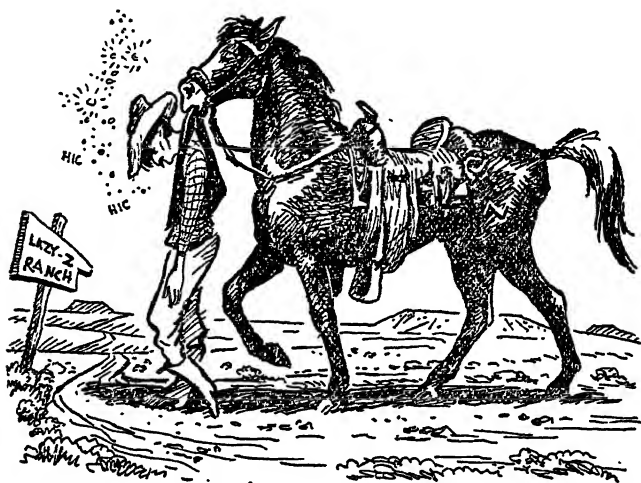
The outstanding lie about saloons is the one about the old boy who was a common cowhand who strolled into Fred Korn's swell place one day and bellied up to the bar and placed a dime on the bar, and said, "Give me a drink." The bartender was insulted. He said, "We don't serve any dime drinks here." The cowhand picked up his dime and said, "Well I can't drink that nickel stuff."

Another old story is told about a couple of soused cowhands. One of them finally went and got a doctor to come and visit his bunkmate. The doctor arrived and said that he couldn't find anything the matter with the patient. The boy who went for the doctor said, "The hell they ain't anything

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the matter with him. The room is full of alligators and elephants and he must be blind cause he can't see them."

Without ever going in a saloon, you could absorb quite a definite impression of what was going on as most of the fights that started inside, ended up outside in the street. The hitching racks in front of the saloons were always full of horses. Sometimes a cowboy would get a little too much fire-water and forget all about leaving his horse tied and start back to the ranch on foot. Then somebody would come by and check the brand on the horse and then check up on the cowhand and find out he was gone. They would turn the



*They would turn the horse loose . . .*

horse loose and most of the time he would go on home or overtake his man on the road.

It was right hard for a horse to get over the tracks and occasionally the horse would be found wandering among the railroad ties days later without a rider. The sheriff could read the brand on a horse as easily as a highway cop can read

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numbers on an automobile, and the morning-after was closely checked by the horse that was left tied all night.

Across the alley behind the saloons was a large livery stable and many of the boys had standing dates with the livery stable owner to take care of their mounts. Some of them couldn't get enough in one day and would just stay on until their funds ran slap out. Near the end of the funds, the end of physical endurance arrived and back of our drugstore there was an open yard where the punchers would be trying to catch up on their lost sleep. Sometimes it was hard to distinguish between them and the white sow and her litter of pigs. Both the pigs and the cowhands were muddy — one as much as the other. Usually, however, the white sow would get up and walk off, like she had a feeling the neighborhood was getting run down.

At first Big Spring had combination saloons, dance halls, and eating-houses, but afterwhile these things began to be made separate. In other words, folks decided that when a man ate he got to drinking and when he drank he got to looking around for a woman and it was best not to have all three in the same building — too handy and convenient. So these three prime entertainments were segregated — everywhere except at the Klondyke.

But the Klondyke remained on the main drag with a combination saloon and eating-house downstairs and a rooming-house upstairs. The ladies of the evening were all in another part of the city, which was quite a blow to the boys who found it so pleasant to have all the favorite forms of vice under one roof.

When the law decided to remove all the questionable ladies from Main Street, two men were partners in the Klondyke. One was a kind of a nice, easy-going fellow who never

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drank much and just took his profit and stayed out of trouble. His partner was a great big bully, weighing about two hundred and fifty pounds and a tough customer.

The first man was peaceable and did most of the work, tending bar all the time, but the big one did a lot of talking and bragging. He boasted that the law couldn't make him do anything he didn't want to and he didn't want to remove his girl from Main Street. Well, his partner was in favor of obeying the law and not starting anything with the sheriff, so they had a row.

The big man said: "To hell with the law. I'll do anything I damn please with whoever I damn please," or words to that effect. So he kept his unauthorized version of lady installed in his rooming-house upstairs where she got to acting high and mighty, as she was practically the last of the scarlet sisterhood on Main Street. She would come downstairs dressed up in all her finery and sashay around the bar like the Queen Bee.

The peaceable man didn't like this much and the sheriff didn't like it at all, so the peaceable partner took it up with his blustering associate and told him not to let the woman come down to the bar any more as it was causing unfavorable comment from the Law. This time they nearly came to blows, and the fat boy stalked off hollering obscene remarks, and said he would do as he pleased.

Sure enough, he went right upstairs and brought his girl down, and he came with her — a two-hundred-and-fifty pound Romeo with his hip pocket bulging with dangerous hardware. The pious partner told the lady to go on back upstairs and the shooting started.

According to Jim Winslow, the first shot the little man let loose with, hit Romeo in the cheek, went right through and cut his tongue in two places. He spit one of them out and

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made funny noises with the other end. Then he got into action, but his aim was bad. The next bullet stopped him as it was a bull's eye. He was no more trouble to anybody on earth.



*He brought his girl downstairs . . .*

That put an end to vice on Main Street as far as the damsels were concerned. It put the fear of consequences into other saloon keepers who were harboring girls, and the girls themselves decided the climate was healthier in more remote regions of town. There was a house of high type on one side, but across the tracks there was one where nobody was particular.

One of the main things men used to fight and get killed

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over was women. Seems like every sucker who wore pants thought he was a Romeo to some woman or other, regardless of how he looked or smelled. Though I haven't heard of any men scrapping over women lately, I think it is probably because competition is not so fierce now and anyway, women are now doing the fighting.

It was rare when a Saturday got by in the old days without some sucker inviting another one out in the backyard or the street in front of the saloon to settle the matter with their fists. The funniest part of it all to me now is that the gal invariably up and married the durn cowhand that got licked in the fight. Women are sure funny that way.

The law didn't take much interest in hand-to-hand combat or notice these small-fry scraps unless the contestants got to shooting or carving each other up with sheep knives, and then it was disturbing the peace and the sheriff would have to step in. But a couple of men battling each other around the backyard of the saloon didn't make any nevermind to anybody, even me, who was usually out there making up some more prairie-dog carbon. It was so usual and regular I didn't even stop to watch them. They generally scrapped around until they got it out of their systems and wound up by going back in the saloon and having a drink together, after which they rode home in the same hack.

After Main Street was purified of undesirable women, it was a quiet place as we didn't have anything to fight over. But once in awhile the girls themselves, who seemed to enjoy the smell of blood, would start tales that would wind up in a free-for-all. I've seen them come down the street and call their men out of the saloons by sending a messenger in after them. This was usually after dark. Men, especially the married ones, weren't too proud of being reminded of their sins, and the girls knew better than to do it in broad daylight.

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After a first-class shooting or so, the girls would keep their mouths shut for a long time or else they would be run out of town. Mostly they were drifters, anyway, God help them. They almost always behaved as well as any lady could, with a few exceptions, and I used to wonder sometimes why they had to shoulder all the responsibility for sin which was only half their fault. But there I go again. I reckon I'll have to hire that hall yet.

As a rule the cowboys were a mighty clean outfit. They were good men. The bad ones didn't last too long. Every woman was a lady downtown, regardless of what she was in her place of business. That was their code. She might be a "woman" in her profession, but she was a lady to all of them when she came through town in her buggy. The cowhand's idea was that any woman couldn't be much worse than most men, which still holds good.

When it came to real ladies, cowhands had more respect for them than any other breed on earth. They had real manners when it came to nice women. The young ladies were always "Miss" or "Missy" and their mothers were "Ma'am," and as such they were respected with gentle, old-fashioned courtesy. Cowmen would be ashamed to be seen drunk around such ladies.

The bartenders usually tried to persuade the cowboys to checks their pistols at the saloon before they got started, but sometimes they didn't have any luck. The wild ones would oftentimes end up in jail and had to be taken out and loaded up in a hack and driven back to the ranch. Over a week-end the damages to individuals and business houses were carefully checked and proper replacements had to be made. These cases rarely got into court, because the ranch managements would see that the damages were settled.

Each large ranch had its own set of codes and morals and



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they varied widely. Some ranch outfits, when they came to town, would set up their own government for two or three days and the rest of us would kinder take out and make ourselves scarce in the interests of our health, but they would promptly pay for all the destruction — all the lights they shot out and all the mirrors they busted up in saloons. The better saloons carried spare mirrors for their back bars, because when the boys got around a certain amount of that electrifying pizen, they positively could not be deterred from shooting them up. Mirrors and lights just drew their gunfire like a magnet. Also some cowhand drunk always had an irresistible desire to ride his horse into the saloon and let him look around.

I might say right here that I never saw in our saloons any such fracas as you see in the average horse opera or movie about the Old West. As a class, the cowhands were just playful people, who when they felt frisky couldn't resist riding into a saloon on horseback and doing a little target practice on the chandeliers or some gal's picture hanging on the wall over the pool tables. But the movie cowboy never happened here and I hope to God he never will.

Of course, gambling was second nature to any cowpuncher. He had to work so hard for his money, the idea of doubling it on short notice was too much for him. This ephemeral dream hardly ever came to pass, but they always kept hoping it would. This kept him squatting around a poker table or playing faro or dice or birdcage, until his money was all gone. Then he had to drown his sorrows on the cuff, which he did. Games went on all night long and when the streaks of dawn showed over the horizon you could still hear the silver dollars rattling in the back rooms of saloons. Naturally this work was harder than herding cows and a lot less productive, but

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the boys were all smitten with it. Now I hear tell, they sit around the bunkhouse and play bridge.

Yes, times have really changed. The cowboys have learned bridge and up there in New York, I understand they have to have a special ruling in some hotels and places to keep women from taking over the bars entirely. They have to have special bars with a "MEN ONLY" sign or a man can't drink in peace without having a lot of mink coats pushing him out of the way and the air smelled up with Shocking perfume. A real lady not only wouldn't be caught dead in a saloon in Big Spring in the nineties, she wouldn't walk on the same side of the street with one and wouldn't let her children either.



*If a Big Spring lady had ordered a drink!*

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Sometimes when I see these modern girls whipping into a bistro or whatever they call it, I get a picture of what would have happened if a Big Spring lady of the nineties had sailed into a saloon, wearing her good black skirt with the over-drape, her white shirt waist with a collar up under her ears and high bones to make it stay there, her black sailor hat perched behind the smooth roll of her pompadour, no lip-paint nor rouge, and asked for a drink. Why a shooting would have been nothing compared to the consternation such a happening would have evoked. Strong men would have turned pale and everybody in the place would have known that he was drunk, including the bartender, who never touched a drop.

"Those were the days," I said, "When whiskey was whiskey, and it was made for men to drink."

"Look," he said. "How can I get around this local option?"

# 7

## BARBERSHOP BALLAD

**M**y friend flopped on a chair behind the prescription case. "I'm plumb wore out," he said, falling into the venacular.

"Where have you been," I asked him, corking the prescription I had just finished filling.

"I had a haircut," he answered, "at that barbershop down the street."

"I never heard that referred to as work," I said, "at least not for the fellow who was getting it."

"I'm exhausted by being the receptacle of confidences," he said. "That barber talked my ear off."

"It's a funny thing," I pondered, "how little barbers change."

"Yes?" he said, ears still wide open.

"But you must be tired of being talked at," I said.

"Go on," he told me. "About the barbershops . . ."

The first place the cowpunchers made a break for when they got to town was the barbershop. There were some ranches far to the northwest whose wagons didn't get to Big Spring oftener than every six months and the cowhands wouldn't make it into civilization any oftener.

I used to think that this was where the term "wild and wooly West" was dervied from. Hair grows a long distance

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on the range in six months, and so does a beard. The barbers would whack off enough hair and shave off enough beard on one of these Saturdays to stuff a hair mattress. Then the cowboy would take his biennial bath, get his boots shined and hit out for the general store to buy himself a new shirt and a pair of chaps and he was ready to knock the girls dead.



*The barber saw all, heard all, knew all . . .*

Beside that, the boys who had been out of circulation a long time caught up on all the national and international news and local gossip in the barbershop, so when they got out, they would know who was laying for whom, who wasn't talking to whom, who had been shot or shot at since the last session and whose girls he better not try to make a date with. When he got out of the barbershop he had all the required information for handling his social contacts. The barber saw all, heard all, knew all, and told all to everybody. He was

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the towncrier, armed with a strop and a razor, and a good pair of lungs. His wind never gave out.

In addition to being a disseminator of news and custodian of the public's appearance, the old-time barber was a super-salesman. It was hard to get out of his chair without spending seventy-five cents to a dollar. He had hair tonics that would grow hair on eggs, he had dandruff remover of which one drop would kill all of the dandruff west of Fort Worth, and he sold it all day long, year after year. That's salesmanship.

The local tonsorial parlors always fascinated me when I was a kid. Hot political arguments, discussions on the Spanish-American war, how McKinley had ruined the country, what cows were worth and how the farmers were ruining the country, were chief topics of conversation. The local weather prophets gathered there to chew their "chawing" and tell about the bark being thicker on the mesquites, which signified a hard winter, and the skunks and wolves had thicker fur than they had borne since the blizzard year of '88.

We had two shops, one with six chairs, one with two, and a lonely Negro who had his one chair and who played solitaire most of the time. These barbershops were always next to a saloon. It was the saloons that had the crowds. The reason one shop had a door leading directly into the bar, may have been because the whiskey killed the pain of the dull razor.

Twenty to twenty-five ill-shorn men waiting in a barber shop couldn't read the one copy of the paper, and they got tired of talking to each other. In fact, these men didn't do too much talking anytime. The gradual process of development of the Barbershop Quartette was the result. A few of the boys got their "tonnage" next door in the saloon and drifted into the barbershop and some of this stuff that they

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served made men sing. Some of it made them fight, but the singers started in the barbershop got enough together for some harmony and each Saturday night when they could get together we had "Old Black Joe," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Farewell My Love," "After The Ball Is Over," "Daisies Won't Tell," while the hanging lamps shimmied their protest far into the night.

That's how the Barbershop Ballad was born.

As soon as a local boy got old enough to feel a little fuzz on his upper lip, he invested in a cup with his individual brush and with his name in gold on the outside, advertising the fact that, at last, he was at least budding into manhood. Long rows of pigeonholed racks held these "name mugs." The barber usually used his own soap and mug on account of the fact that the sandstorms made the soap mixture in the cups that had stood so long hard on his razor, but everybody who had enough money had his own barber and his own cup. Nothing could take that cup out of its rack except death.

The blushing maidens of Big Spring had to look down or across the street when they passed a barbershop as it wasn't ethical to look inside — might see a man with his collar off. I've often wondered why the women at that time ever looked down at anything. A man never got a chance to check *his* package until after he married anyway, they were wrapped up in so many skirts and whalebones. No women ever looked up when she passed a barbershop, but it may have been because she had to look down to keep from stumbling over the patches in the board walks, or to avoid a hole, as the heels were high then too, only they didn't kick them up as much. Maybe it was because the odors which emanated from the barbershop, composed of a mixture of barber's soap, unwashed cowhand, and bay rum didn't smell like lily of the valley.

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One thing that I do know now, most men can wear one-half of the clothes that he wears and still have twice as much on as the average modern woman, but in those days, women wore clothes by the bolt. Hence to see a man practically out in public without a durn collar that chokes him might have been a sin. Anyway, high collars were the vogue in town. In the ranch country they wore a red bandana handkerchief, but the high collar and the red bandanas met on equal footing at the barbershops. It was democracy in its purest form.

The barbershop, like the saloon and the drugstore and nearly everywhere else, was strictly the male domain. (When I recount these things, I wonder what is happening to us men. If there is any place left that is the male domain I would like to hear where it is. Everytime I am able to get in my own bathroom (after standing in line) to shave, my daughter starts pounding on the door and says she left her lipstick and rat-tail curl comb on the laundry basket and kindly hand it to her). There was no such thing as a manicurist. The cowboys that hadn't worn their fingers to the bone working, just cut 'em off with a nail clipper or a jack-knife. The idea of a girl playing with the big ham of a cow-puncher and washing the sheep dip out from under his nails with a brush and soapy water would have scared the cowboy into the middle of kingdom come. In fact, he never heard of a manicure.

The barbershops had the only bathtubs in town. Water was carried, heated on stoves, and poured into the tub and then let run out under the barbershop after the boys got their bath. This spot under the shop made a cool place for the white sow, that patrolled our streets, to raise her family.

Water had to be hauled from the spring two miles. If you wanted water, you put out a red flag, then a water tank would back up and supply your needs at from ten to twenty-



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five cents a barrel, so you can see why a bath cost fifty cents. Hence, lots of dry cleaning was done in these parts, and the impressions that you get from the western movies of the boys are very misleading, because everyone of them that I've ever



*The barbershops had the only bathtubs in town.*

seen in the movies is a durn liar in appearance at least, if not in many other ways. He is too clean and dressed too fancy. Baths were scarce, water was high, and hard to get.

Shaving was done with a long, bare-faced razor, honed on a leather strop or a stone. When the barber got through sharpening it, he would snatch a hair out of his head and whack it to see if the razor was sharp. Everybody got a close

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shave because usually it had to last a long time. Moustaches were in fashion and some of the customers looked like they had swallowed a couple of mustang ponies and left the tails hanging out. Some of these gents were mighty proud and particular about their moustaches and had them trimmed and brushed fashionably and greased them to make them shine.

Haircuts were straight across the back and they shaved the neck so there was usually a strip of white skin where the hair had been, showing above the dark red sunburn and windburn which colored the complexions of range riders like mahogany. Everybody's haircut was alike, and we never heard of any such thing as the contour cut.

The red barber pole in front of the barbershop was one of the most colorful things on Main Street. The barbers kept the stripes painted up and as a usual thing, their shops were clean and attractive. They had hanging kerosene lamps in them which were certainly mighty pretty but didn't give off any more light than any other kerosene lamp. It's a wonder to me that people didn't get their throats cut while the barber was trying to shave them by the flickering light of that hanging masterpiece. He must have shaved them by the touch system. But not only could he shave a fellow without being able to see, he could do it without ever once shutting his trap or coming up for air. He was really a remarkable man.

The first safety razors caused consternation in the barbershops. The reaction of the tonsorial artists was that "there ought to be a law." Those durned things were just out-and-out dangerous. Of course, nearly every man had an old-fashioned razor already, but he hardly ever used it, because if he lived in town, he figured once a week was often enough to shave and by that time his beard was so tough he couldn't cope with it, so the barbershop got his business. If he lived

## BARBERSHOP BALLAD

on a ranch, there wasn't any call to be shaving his face every day; besides long hair was said to be a protection against heat in the summer and cold in the winter and they all needed protection. If long hair and whiskers are insulating material, our population was well-insulated. Around the drugstore, where we sold safety razors, everybody said they were just a fad and a notion and would soon pass on.

Although barbershops didn't have manicurists, each one had a shine boy. He brushed off the excess hair, of which there was invariably considerable with a great long whisk-broom and he could literally play a tune on your back with the durn thing, and it got the job done. Dust and hair were brushed off together. The shine boy could slick up an old pair of boots so you wouldn't know them, but he usually lost money on boot polishing if his labor was worth anything. Not everybody had his boots shined, except after the rains came, and then the mud had to be got off of them or you would be carrying double weight. The cowmen tipped heavily for fixing up their muddy boots, especially if they had had a drink. The shine boy fared pretty well during the rainy season and had to save up enough to carry him through the next drouth.

The barbershop was the most popular place in town on dance nights and the traffic was terrific. Sometimes as many as three men at a time would be waiting in line for the bathtub, and the barber would shear off whiskers and hair all afternoon. Saturdays were the really big days, and I don't know what a barber did with his time all week long, unless it was to amass that unbelievable amount of information which he disseminated to prone and helpless men lying back in his barber chair with a couple of hot towels on their faces and absolutely no way to escape the barber's confidences.

One of the funniest things that ever happened took place

## BARBERSHOP BALLAD

in the barbershop near our drugstore. Practical jokers abound in small towns like this and horseplay is dear to the heart of every male individual. They just haven't got much else to do in their leisure time except to get in trouble. One of the big gawky boys around town who would do anything for a laugh conceived this brilliant idea and persuaded a pal to help him.

They tore his shirt into ribbons and covered his head and shoulders with tomato ketchup, which can look surprisingly like gore. The helper borrowed a butcher knife from the meat market and then they pulled off their circus.

The kid wearing the ketchup went tearing through the barbershop in the middle of the busy Saturday afternoon rush, pursued hotly by the bearer of the butcher knife. The kid in front was yelling bloody murder and adding, "Catch him! Catch him! He's after me. Don't let him kill me!"

They did this twice, ran around the barbershop and came in the back again. The first time, everybody was stunned but the second time they got action. The barbers threw down their razors and started running. The customers rose up, wrapped in sheets and with their collars off, their faces covered with lather and began to run also. Men with half their hair cut sprang out of chairs and loped into the street. Lather and barber towels were shaken off all up and down Main Street. One lone cowboy who was in the bathtub, heard the commotion and came tearing out of the bathroom practically *au naturel*.

Everybody was yelling, "It's a loose maniac. It's a crazy man. Catch him!" The funny thing about it was that they all seemed to be making tracks at the fastest rate of speed they could muster, but they weren't trying to catch him. They were going in the opposite direction.

Another funny thing was that they all looked crazier in

## BARBERSHOP BALLAD

their sheets, towels and lather than any real maniac has a right to look.

Barbershops were a real comfort to the citizens in those days and many a lonely cowboy dreamed of one when he was out eating dust and trying to keep the herd from stampeding. If anything was valuable in Big Spring, a bath and a shave and a haircut were it. They were the great luxuries — soap for shaving, water for bathing and a practiced hand to whack off your locks. Sometimes when I am shaving off my whiskers twice in one day when I am threatened with going out in society in the evening by my wife, I marvel to think how much we take for granted all those things which were as precious as rubies to the men I used to know.

Why, I bet if the water didn't spurt out of the tap into my bathtub the minute I turned the spigot now, I would raise holy hell and sound off on what I thought of public utilities. I would be outraged if I couldn't take a bath any minute I picked out, and yet there was a time when a bath had to be hauled two miles in a barrel, heated on a wood stove, and poured from kettles into an old tub. And I was glad to get it — glad! I thought more of that bath than I ever think of these.

I looked at my friend. He was sound asleep, and I don't know as I blame him.

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**T**he salesman closed up his kit of samples, tipped his hat and went out, polite and quiet as you please.

"Who was he?" my friend asked.

"That was a salesman," I said. "My, those boys sure have toned down since I first got in this business. They used to have real glamour."

"How's that?" he said. He had got so he talked more like me than I talked.

"I was just thinking about drummers," I mused. "They don't even wear wild neckties any more. Look just like anybody else."

"How were they then?" he asked.

There was an old saying out here that God took care of fools, children, drunkards, and drummers, but the drummers I used to know way back when, hardly needed any help from the Almighty to handle the situation. In fact, they were so full of conversation on every subject you might have thought they could give the High Command pointers. They were really the glamour boys in Big Spring in the late nineteenth century. The whole town (especially the girls who should have been at home practicing the piano or helping their Mamma) turned out for the arrival of one of these commer-

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cial travelers. He was nigh as good as the coming of the circus.

To begin with, the drummer generally had a waxed moustache. Now a moustache was a common enough thing but



*The drummers — they were the glamour boys of Big Spring . . .*

when it was pointed at each end and greased up or dyed black, it was pretty uncommon, especially in Big Spring where people sometimes didn't even get their whiskers cut off for weeks at a time. Then, he had on a flashy suit, something on the general order of a horse blanket, a waistcoat which was a different color — frequently a pale tan or white

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flannel with checks and sometimes, sprinkled with flowers like a window drapery with cuffs hanging and blazing cuff links — a stiff shirt and a four-in-hand tie with a large loose knot which was of a color suitable to flag the bulls at a rodeo. In this was embedded a stickpin that resembled the light on a locomotive. His shoes were always shined in an inch of their lives and this was a great novelty as nobody ever shined their shoes much unless he was going to a dance, but this man wore shined shoes every day. He was a regular dude.

It never really occurred to us that anyone like this could work, but there probably wasn't a harder job anywhere in Christendom than the one the commercial traveler had in those days. He spent his life in a mail hack or behind his own team, driving along the rutted roads, axle deep in dust, at the mercy of sandstorms, cyclones, and the natives he had to deal with. Traveling men that ride around now in Pullman cars and sleep in hotel rooms don't know anything about "the road." In those days it was *really* the road, and how these boys managed to keep themselves groomed up like prize calves at the fat stock show, has always been a mystery to me.

Some of the drummers came in on the train, such as it was, usually a mixed affair composed of a lot of cattle cars and one for passengers or maybe he rode in the caboose with the train crew. Whenever a drummer got in on an evening train, there was always an admiring bevy of girls gathered at the depot to watch what was under the derby hat alight, pick up his samples, and walk over to the hotel. He would give the girls a knowing look and if there was a specially pretty one in the crowd, he would single her out for a leer (which she didn't understand much, but it made her blush up to the roots of her hair and get the giggles) and then he would use a bunch of big words that would cause the natives to nearly swallow their "chawin'."



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"There goes a mighty smart man," the freight agent would say to the passenger agent and everybody who was too old to worry about whether the drummer was a menace to his love life, nodded and concurred. Young fellows weren't so sure, but they were green with envy at his getup, and they knew that he was just a stumbling block to local courting. It's bruited about that clothes don't make the man but they sure made the drummer.

The peddlers that came in on the mail hack weren't quite so pretty as the ones that got off the train, but in view of the fact that they had been bouncing over dirt roads all day behind a team of mules or horses, they looked more spic and span than they had any right to. The mail hack got in from both the north and the south in the evening and the drummers met here, got off and spent the night. They took their turns at the bathtub in the barbershop, got a shave, and an extra portion of the bay rum, then they put on their wonderful habiliments and strolled forth to astonish the desert air. The gals all went mad and found excuses to walk past the hotel in droves.

Mamma and Papa, who took a large hand in daughter's doings then, didn't exactly trust the drummer. They had a reason to feel that his intentions might be strictly dishonorable. Pa admitted that he was "right smart," but he didn't want his gal making a spectacle of herself. Mamma, who wanted daughter to make a good marriage then, the same as now, "hoped for the best." But at that, courting between the drummer and the local beauties had to be carried on the hard way. They worked at it, but I don't know of any girls who ever really married a drummer. Usually the boys had financeés back home and were just lonesome for a little feminine companionship. They didn't have any trouble selling this bill of goods to the girls, but their folks didn't take

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to it so much. After all, their daughter couldn't be seen around with a drummer. She had to think of her reputation. Drummers were about the only dressed-up people we saw outside of the actors that played the Opera House and whenever either one of these categories came to town, Mammassure got their gals inside and shut the gate.

At a line of real bull, the cigar salesmen always seemed to be the most adept. Their spiel was something to listen to. They never took, "No," for an answer from any merchant — not them. They just kept on writing and talking and telling funny stories so fast that before he knew it, the proprietor of the store had signed the book on the order blank and he didn't know what in hell he had contracted for. He was so wrought up by the wit and charm of the drummer that he couldn't tell you whether he was buying cigars or cattle. These birds had personal magnetism by the carload and I sometimes think that's why we seemed to have so many punk cigars in the Old West. They could sell our naïve buyers dried cabbage and make them like it.

Drug drummers were on the top rung of magnetism too. They were hard-working men who had to pack an awful load of samples. When they came to town they stayed several days because they usually had to drive their own hacks due to the quantity of stuff they carried. They would stay in town to rest their horses and give the local maidens a real treat. Sometimes they would hire a hack in one town and drive it to the next and leave it and hire one there and go to the next town. A drummer coming from the other direction would pick up their hacks and drive them back to the livery stable they belonged to. But the successful ones owned their own teams and hacks and they used to come spanking into town behind a team of bays with their harness ajingle, like the lords of creation.

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We didn't work with salesmen in the store in the daytime. Usually we transacted our buying business after the store was closed and you know what time the store was closed. Most business conferences took place in the bar and the salesmen would fool around playing pool or entertaining some young lady or other, if he could wedge his foot in anybody's front door, until the old man got off from the store. Then they would meet in the bar and play a hand of seven-up or a game of checkers and he would sell him the goods. Drummers led a glamorous life. They worked when nobody else worked. They didn't work when everybody else did. They had flamboyant clothes, florid language, and brand new jokes — jokes for men only.

In addition these salesmen were also newscasters. They brought details of national events fresh from the cities and they always seemed to know everything about everybody. They served, along with their regular capacities as salesman, the same kind of purpose the intimate columnist now serves. They dished up jokes, scandal, news, philosophy, and tips on various subjects. We depended on them for excitement. Big Spring would have been a dull place without these breezes from the great world outside.

The most colorful of all drummers was the lightning-rod salesman. This type of high-pressure artist has just about disappeared from the face of the earth and probably none too soon. But he was a fascinating cuss and the kind of methods he used have now been legitimized and they call it promotion.

He was an artful dodger. He would hibernate until after there had been a bad storm, of which we had plenty, and then he would come out like a prairie dog whose hole has been filled with water, armed with pen sketches of houses and barns that had been burned down, blown away, and struck

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by lightning. Some of the pictures he had of the terrible effects of lightning would make your blood run cold — horrifying scenes of dead and mutilated children, cattle piled up in the corner of a pasture, chimneys toppling over with bricks hitting folks in the head and red-ink blood flowing. He felt it was his bounden duty — a high cause — to warn people of the terrible risks they were running with their lives, families, and property, if they didn't have lightning rods.

Lightning-rod selling was a door-to-door affair, except sometimes it was fifty miles between doors. The lightning-rod salesman would pick out his victim, oftenest a man who had a yardfull of kids and a little herd of cows, and then he would go to town. He would sit in the parlor, showing his dreadful cartoons with the tears streaming down his face and his voice quavering over the descriptions of the demise of those poor innocent young ones, always adding, "The same thing might happen to yours." He would squall and bawl with his prospects like a bull with a cockleburr under his tail.

The first thing that happened was that the lady of the house would be overcome with his emotion and cry too, and then she would ask him to stay for dinner. When Pa got in from his work, the same scene would be re-enacted. But maybe Pa didn't have the money and had a note coming due soon and he wouldn't be sold. The lightning-rod salesman would fill up with food and give him a sad look every once in awhile, but he wouldn't get anywhere. Pa would go stomping off to the pasture and the lightning-rod salesman would get out and look around hoping for a thunderhead in the sky. He would walk all around the house and say it certainly was in a dangerous place, that lightning nearly always followed a draw or struck a knoll or wherever the house happened to be situated. He could think up a story to fit the circumstances.

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That night when Pa got in for supper, the lightning-rod salesman would say he had decided he better not try to get on to the next ranch, because he felt a storm in the air. Then he would ask the father of the household and the mother and all the family to kneel with him in prayer. At this point he would deliver a mighty supplication for the safety of these poor, innocent children, exposed to the dangers of the elements and probably marked for early graves. He would make the storm that was coming so realistic and the suffering and death so eminent, that the will power of the father would crumble into bits and before you knew it, Pa was sitting there signing the order for a bunch of lightning rods he didn't need any more than I need a tailcoat. Emotion always got them.

The result of this was that about every house in Big Spring and the surrounding country was loaded down with a bunch of gadgets which disfigured the looks of them and couldn't any more deflect lightning, according to science, than I can. Though the house didn't cost a dime more than two hundred and fifty dollars, it usually had at least a hundred dollars worth of lightning protection on it. Why, do you know these durn salesmen used to sell lightning rods to those poor old sod farmers that lived in dugouts with just a few boards and the roof above the surface of the ground. More than that, the farmers paid for them. There is no accounting for what the human being can and will do if somebody plays on his heart-strings and scares him up enough.

Stuck away on the shelf or along with the marriage license in the family Bible in every home there was a certificate, a written guarantee against lightning striking that particular house. This certificate was one of the fanciest things you ever saw, drawn up like a college diploma with a large, magnificent gold seal and two little strings of blue ribbon coming out

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from the seal. It was signed with flourishing signatures — right pretty thing. You can imagine how much good such a guarantee would be if lightning had taken a notion to strike the house. It would probably have burned up along with everything on the place.



*They used to sell lightning rods to sod farmers . . .*

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We never got a chance to get on very familiar terms with these lightning-rod men, although they used more impressive terms than any other type of salesman and would discourse at length in the bars or around the drugstore on subjects of meteorological significance. Most of them posed as scientists and they had a mouth full of big talk, but you didn't get to know them. They worked fast and they never came back. I never heard of a lightning-rod salesman playing a return engagement. I guess they had an inkling that if they turned up at some of those farms where they had sold lightning rods, the farmer might have got wise to himself and would be after them with a pitchfork, a little private lightning-striking on his own hook. No, sir, when they left town, they left for good, and we didn't have any more trouble with them until a lot of new people who hadn't heard about the disasters of lightning moved in. Then we would have a totally new crop of lightning-rod salesmen.

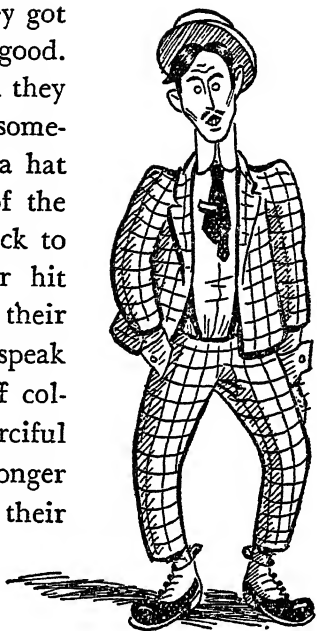
We used to have a hard time with our young folks after a siege of drummers had been to town and gone. The girls all mooned around and nothing in Big Spring seemed to suit them. It was all just too bucolic and dull. And the boys, who had been occupied with making slurring remarks about the drummers' derby hats, tight pants, and patent-leather shoes, now began to feel the need of them, since the enemy had retreated. The stores always had to lay in a stack of red neckties, high collars, patent-leather and fancy vests to supply the popular demand. Hardly any of them ever got as far as a stickpin.

You can imagine how a cowhand, who never had worn anything in his life but a sombrero, chaps, a pair of high-heeled boots, with a red bandana handkerchief as his only decoration, looked in a getup of pointed patent-leather shoes and a

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store-bought outfit. The angle they got those derby hats on their heads was good. But the whole thing blew up when they went in a bar to get a drink and somebody grabbed the derby and did a hat dance on it. That was the end of the derby and things gradually got back to normal. Before another drummer hit town, the boys had drifted back to their old ways — reverted to type, so to speak — and had thrown away their stiff collars and got rid of those unmerciful shoes. The epidemic rarely lasted longer than a month and then they “lost their pride,” as my sister used to say. And I bet they sure were glad to lose it.

Drummers were a bright spot in our lives. We used to gape at them and think about how rich they were, and what fabulous lives they lived. Most of them didn't have a thing more than the clothes on their backs and probably owed money for their team and hack. When I get to dreaming about the past I wonder what happened to those old boys. Most of them must be dead at this writing, but wherever they went after they died, I bet they drove a spanking team of bays and had a line of fast talk that was as convincing as all-get-out. Saint Peter will have to watch those peckerwoods. They'll sell *him* a bill of goods.



*You can imagine how a cowhand looked in a store-bought suit.*

“Can't you remember any of those funny stories they used to tell?” my friend asked me.



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"Can't say that I do. Why?"

"I'd just like to hear what a Gay Nineties joke sounds like?"

"Listen," I said. "Next time you see a traveling salesman, ask him to tell you one. They're still telling 'em. That's something else that hasn't changed a bit. Drummers' jokes. Changed! Why they're the same old stories."

## 9

### GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES

“**T**here’s one thing I’d like to know,” my friend said.  
“What is a dogie?”  
“Don’t say that!” I said.  
“What?” he asked, astonished at my strong feelings.  
“Don’t say it like it was spelled ‘Doggie!’ ”

Every once in awhile I turn on the radio and hear some would-be nasal tenor out loose singing, “Git Along, Little Dogies, Get Along,” and almost all of them pronounce “dogie” as if they were singing about a dog. In the name of all of the old-time cowhands who have gone over the Divide and those who are left, I want to correct the way these tenors pronounced *dogie*. It’s pronounced *dō-gie* with a long *o*, like the *o* in *doe*, and I hasten to assure you that there is no relation between a dogie and a dog.

A dogie is a calf whose mother is dead and whose father is a traveling man. These poor little calves had to adopt both a mother and a father, and sometimes both sides of the adopted family resented the calf to the extent that it was kicked about



LITTLE DOGIES

... a calf whose mother is dead and whose father is a traveling man.

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constantly and had to be carried in the chuck wagon for a long time after its birth. It always takes several weeks to convince the other cows in the herd that they have adopted another child — seems like the “cow family” doesn’t take too well to having an extra child around that they can’t explain — anyhow we find a very few self-respecting cows with two children. It always takes the cowhand several days to initiate the mama cow to the new order of things that exist both in the cow family and out of it, to a certain extent. The poor little dogie has a hard time and is usually a scrawny little outfit, and is as lonesome as the cactus on the range.

It always takes a lot of persuasion to get a new mama for a calf that is an orphan, and as none of us seem to be very proficient in cow language, all we can use is force to convince the new mama of her duties toward the adopted calf, as she resents it very much. Every herd, of course, has a certain number of dogies just as we have in the human family, but they are usually more easily explained.

In the days that have gone before, the poor camp cook had to be wet nurse to many dogies. In fact, as his wagon was usually littered with ten or fifteen of these fatherless and motherless outfits, he was always tempted to have veal for every meal, but he had to tolerate them between meals and give them free taxi service (which may explain the peculiar taste that the beans sometimes had).

When the cowhands were ridin’ the trail, the camp cook followed the cattle and cowhands with his chuck wagon, which carried all the supplies, and was usually miles behind the herd. The chuck wagon was an all-important part of the life that both men and beasts led. It was presided over by the camp cook and carried an improvised box on the back in which was toted the bacon and beans. It had a top on it that

## GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES

let down from the back, with a leg under it when it was down, which formed a table where the cook provided sourdough for biscuits and washed the sand out of the beans and the ants off the other foods. Beans, red Mexican frijoles, the main diet, had to soak overnight before they were cooked in the old iron kettles that were placed on a fire made of dried cow dung. The beans were cooked with a slab of sowbelly which was usually so salty that it made the cowhands get up off their haunches, after eating a tin plate of the mess, and run for water.

The chuck wagon also carried the extra saddles and other supplies of all kinds, including the carbolic acid, screw-worm killer, paregoric for those who drank water that was slightly gyp, and a gallon or so of more or less dependable whiskey that always made the boys want to ride a bronc. I note that practically all of the things they used have changed now except the whiskey, and it seems to me that every time we get a charge of the modern variety, it seems to have the same effect. But instead of busting a bronc, we usually gather in and around the dining room or kitchen table and give vent to our feelings with the discords of "Sweet Adeline."

After the cowhands had had their fill of chuck, they treated their minor scratches and bruises with a dab of iodine, then, using their saddles for pillows and their saddle blankets to keep them warm, gazed into the heavens, that we never see any more, and dreamed of the time when they would get back to town and spend their thirty dollars in about two hours and a half, after which they would be ready to ride again. If it rained, there was the usual scrap to see who got under the wagon to sleep, but the range boss usually slept inside the wagon. He was royalty and got as much as

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fifty dollars a month, and his word was supreme authority when they drove up the trail.

The cowhands stood guard at night in four-hour shifts, and it was then that the boys hummed a kind of lullaby to the cattle to keep them quiet and to ward off the feeling of loneliness that even yet seems to get all of us when we are alone at night. Riding herd at night, when it was raining and lightning, caused the cattle to get restless, and they would often turn their tails to the wind and get going.

It was hard to get them rounded up so they would start to milling in a circle and would eventually wear themselves out. But I can close my eyes now and hear the cowhands beating their slickers and yelling to keep the stampede from forming. A stampede was a disaster on a bad night. Many of the cattle never were found after a stampede, and some of those durn wild ones must be going yet from the start they made. I can think of many things more pleasant than a thousand hell-bent cattle spreading over the landscape each using its own judgment as to direction, and bawling and raising a lot of individual hell, as the hands tried to get them back into the herd, while the thunder and lightning and torrents of rain kept them scared to death.

We had lots of broken bones and limps after a stampede, and many interesting stories have died with the men who made this cow country what it is, because their stories were never in print.

Coyotes were a nuisance, killing calves at night. These coyotes are the smartest things that live on four feet. They can slink up at night and kill a young calf and get away before many of the cowhands can get their forty-fives out and start shooting. Then, the next day after the herd has passed, the mangey coyote sneaks back and gets a veal steak — except that it's kind of out of date by then.

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The time varied as to how long it took to drive a herd from Big Spring up the trail to Kansas. According to the estimates I have heard offered through the years in the drug-store, the usual herd moved about eight to ten miles a day, and this had to be spaced according to the waterholes and the amount of grass they could find. Sometimes the herds were allowed to rest for days at some good watering hole, where the grass was good, so that they would gain enough strength to "carry on."

When a cowman registered his brand at the court house in the vicinity where he expected to run his cattle on the open range before the fences came 'long, he had to use two precautions, one being that he had to select a brand and ear mark that couldn't be changed easily by the brethren who believed in "free living," that is, by the sweat of the other fellow's brow. The second precaution was to be sure to select a brand that didn't look like someone else's brand in a big herd.

You take a herd of possibly fifteen hundred or two thousand bawling excited cattle and let them kick up a dust that looks like a spring sandstorm and have the cowhands ride among them and try to cut out certain brands. If the brands are not pretty plain you can see it was easy to get the wrong steer. And maybe it would never be found out until he was miles away and then he had to notify the adjoining cow outfit that he had accidentally picked up the wrong steer and that the next time they had a roundup he would return the missing merchandise.

Each cattle outfit had certain range borders that they tried to keep their cattle in, and the men who kept them back were called reefers. These reefers (and I don't know where the name came from) kept throwing the cattle back as they

## GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES

drifted so that to a certain extent they had some unwritten laws that they really tried to more or less observe. Of course, they didn't have the fences to interfere, and as the cattle drifted they might have drifted too far at times, and then, of course, if their brands were not too plain, they were just "naturalized" and became members of the other fellows herds against the will of the cow and the man who had lost the cow.

There were many deeds to the property and it was open range and everybody turned their cattle loose on it. In the spring of the year when a new crop of calves came on, a roundup would be staged and lots of times the calves got separated from their mothers, by accident or otherwise, and got the wrong brand on them. Anyhow, there were lots of calves with a big "S" on their sides following a cow that had a "Bar 7" on her side, which is hard to explain especially in those days of so-called shooting and then asking questions.

I am certain that although we did not know it, these calves were stolen in a nice gentleman-like manner by some large ranch owner who had a big bunch of cowhands who could either run the other bunch off or roundup a little faster. I have often heard it said that many a West Texas fortune was built on the diligence and industry of a few men who started out with nothing but a horse and started to gathering up cattle without brands as they went along and when they got to market, six months later, that had a pretty good bank roll without any investment, hiring cowhands as the cattle drifted along, and letting them mix with the other cattle on the open range and then just walking off with the other fellows' cattle.

Anyhow, the brand or mark was what made the cow or calf yours. They were separated and driven up to market —

## GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES

the Chisholm Trail and other trails made famous in cowboy songs.

The average herd driven up the trail comprised from one to four thousand head and up as high as six thousand, at times. It usually took six months to make the trip to Abilene, Kansas, grazing and watering the cattle as they went.

Adolph Miller, one of our old-time cowmen, told me that a man who made it out here usually made it in one good lick. He sold when cows were high and bought when they were low and the Lord sent enough rain to keep the things fat until he sold them. Adolph says that he has seen several trades made where the ranch owner got so disgusted with the drouth he would just round his cattle up and let them all go to the highest bidder, calves and all.

The roundups in the spring usually lasted three to four months according to the territory to be covered and the men lived around the chuck wagon and slept on their blankets using their saddles for pillows if they needed one to keep their heads out of the water, and covered their blankets with their slickers.

The largest roundup that Adolph Miller reckoned he ever saw was ten to fifteen thousand head. Lots of them were bigger but he just didn't see them.

The drugstore requirements for these cowhands and their cattle were not very large. As I look back it seems to me that we have furnished very little medicine to cowhands or to the ranch people. They generally live the healthy outdoor life and, from a druggist's viewpoint, they are distressingly healthy. When a ranch outfit came in to buy their drugs, it was usually something to keep the worms out of the cuts on the cattle or a few pounds of salts and a little bit of turpentine and eight or nine dollars worth of smoking tobacco with the usual amount of "chawin'," and these goods were placed



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in ox wagons which would have as many as forty oxen, twenty yoke, hitched to five or six big heavy wagons that would proceed north carrying their load or freight and mail and supplies. Sometimes these wagons would not go in but once every six months, and the supplies would have to be bought for that length of time.

The annual rodeo wasn't like the ones we have now. It wasn't organized to the extent that now seems necessary but it was plenty rough. The purses for the prizes were made up along Main Street, the saloons, of course, giving the major part of the prize money, because it was always a good investment for them, but every businesshouse chipped in and bought prizes ranging anywhere from a saddle blanket to a forty-dollar saddle. The cowhands, of course, came for hundreds of miles to try to do their stuff. The wagonyards were full to overflowing; the livery stables were crowded, and the sandpiles along the edge of town were used as bunks. Our fourteen-room hotel was full of sleeping and snoring cowhands with their bed rolls, as many as ten in each room. It was just the biggest thing that could happen to us out here.

When the day of the first performance arrived, loud shirts and arm bands with well polished boots were the style, and out to the rodeo we all went, to see some real bronc busters try to ride some real broncs, and to see roping contests that are still the subject of conversation when two old-timers get together.

Miles of ranch buggies, hacks, chuck wagons, and half-drunk cowhands were crowded into the roads around the rodeo grounds. The bucking horses didn't respect any territorial rights and would often throw his would-be rider through the top of a covered wagon, and thus disposing of his load, would pitch and pitch until his saddle went one way

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and his saddle blanket went another, while he sped for the open range.

After the rodeo, the surge of humanity would make for the saloons or the only confectionery that the town sported. (At that time all that the drugstores handled that the cowboys wanted was "first aid" or a free drink of water.) The man who owned the drugstore had signs all along the country roads, "Free ice water at So & So's Drugstore." So you see the trips from the cistern to the water barrel made my life a rather busy one at that time, as I was the waterboy. We had eight or nine tin cups to dip in the barrel, the cups being passed from one to another without any knowledge of the millions of germs that were lurking in each cup ready to strike. Yet I've never known one single epidemic to follow one of those mass water-drinkings. Maybe it was because the cowhands were tougher than the germs.

The rodeos usually lasted four or five days, playing out when the cowhands were out of money and wended their way back to the range to make another thirty dollars.

Probably you have never heard of a stockpen, which is, of course, a temporary hotel for the cows before they are herded, against their will, into long trains of boxcars. After having been driven from one to twenty-four days to a railroad, sometimes even longer journeys than that, accompanied by the usual amount of mental and physical disasters, both for the men and the cows, the stockyards looked good. Long journeys through dust, rains, and storms, hard riding, days and nights, seeking waterholes that proved to be mirages, which meant tightening up the girth on you and your horse, and making another weary journey behind the herd of bawling, wall-eyed, mean cattle, who were a great deal like folks are these days, they just ran and ran until their tongues hung out.

After seventy-five per cent of these herds reached this

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stockpen hotel, they were watered and fed and hustled into cars, against their will, and shipped to market in a very bruised, unsettled and unsatisfactory condition, where they brought about the same amount of money as they do today. But the cost of raising the material was nil, considering just letting them be born and turned loose on the grass, like a lot of our modern women do their children.

Herd of cattle are kind of like herds of folks. They have a leader, and if that leader leads them right, they turn out pretty good, and if that leader leads them wrong, they go to hell, just as the weak of other species do.



*There was a close personal relationship between a ranchman and his horse.*

There was always a close personal relationship between a ranchman and his horse. And no wonder. They were hardly ever separated from each other. The ranchman saw a lot more of his horse than he did anybody else, including his wife, and naturally he got attached to him. So when you hear these sentimental ballads about men and horses in the Old West, you can know that they have foundation in an actual state of af-

fairs. The same thing is true of that saying about horse sense. One of the highest compliments that can be paid a man is to say he has horse sense. A good horse has it naturally.

A good cow horse knew more about the man on his back than the man himself knew. He could sense his disposition and his mood and know which way he was going to turn. He knew when the old boy had been drinking too much and

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could pilot him back to the outfit without any direction whatsoever. Those horses knew as much about handling a bunch of cattle as any man. A roping horse or a cutting horse can do his stuff without the rider ever touching the reins. A cutting horse can cut a cow out of the herd after she has been spotted, without his boss telling him a thing, and a roping horse will keep a steer in position until the rope is thrown, and pull back on the rope after it is around the steer's neck, holding it taut and tight, and keeping the steer down until he is tied.

That kind of horse was invaluable to any ranchman — such a horse meant the difference between failure and prosperity in the ranching business, and the agility and toughness and spirit of a cow pony sometimes meant the difference between life and death to a man. Those cayuses were faithful, loyal devoted friends. They still are. We still have ranches around Big Spring, and though modern conveniences have brought the world closer together and the good cow horse now has his own personal trailer to ride, in many cases when a ranchman goes to visit a herd, such a horse is still indispensable.

A lot of rough stuff has been written and many bad things have been said about the early ranchers, but most of it has been written by people who didn't live here and just came through for a flying trip and then sat down and wrote a book. I can say from a seat on the forty-yard line that no better neighbors or finer men ever lived. The ranchmen had their code and they abided by it. They were quick on the draw, but they hardly ever drew first or without being provoked.

Whenever one of those men left home, he always left the door unlocked. He left some beans hanging in a sack on the rafters and a side of bacon hanging alongside it. He left cornmeal in the meal can and wood in the woodbox. Any restless

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cowhand or footsore traveler or whatnot who came traipsing through the country was always welcome to stop and make himself at home, whether he ever saw the ranchman or not.

There was only one requirement—it was considered highly unethical not to clean up the place after hanging around for a week, during a blizzard or a sandstorm maybe. Ranchmen had lots of land, sometimes they were gone from headquarters for months at a time, but whatever they had was available to anybody who passed that way. I think this open-door policy explains the character and the attitude of a rancher better than anything that can ever be said or written.

If the ranchman was at home, the casual passer-by was his honored guest—had the best seat at the table and the pick of the simple hospitality that these rugged people could offer. “Howdy, stranger,” was a greeting that was always delivered with sincerity and openheartedness. “Unhitch your hoss and come in to dinner,” always went with it. If it was one man or a platoon, the welcome was the same. Food, water, and money were often scarce, but if the ranchman had a thing, half of it was yours.

Ranch homes were almost always isolated—sometimes it



*Ranch houses were always isolated . . .*

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would be thirty-five miles from one house to another — but the people managed to be neighborly. If there was sickness in one ranch house, somebody would start after the doctor. He would ride to the nearest house, leave his horse there, and take the other fellows' and so on until he made it into town. Sometimes it would require three or four changes of horses before he got to the doctor and the return trip would have to be managed the same way. There was always a fresh horse waiting at the next ranch, and the women folks would sometimes bundle up and go right over to the family that was having difficulty. Nothing was too much trouble to do for a neighbor.

The life of a ranch woman in those days was no bed of roses. She lived way out on the ranges in a lonely little house, with nobody to depend on but herself in times of trial. The men were always gone all day, sometimes at night and for weeks at a time when they made the long trips and drove the cattle up the trail. These women rarely knew where their husbands were or when to expect them back and spent long days alone, and nights that were uneasy. Roundup time took days and days and the hardship and dangers of such seasons were well known to these women. They developed the kind of fortitude which made them equal to any occasion and they faced occasions which would make the average female of to-day turn white and fall in a dead faint. Nothing surprised a ranch woman and nothing got her down.

In addition to the mental anguish which went with the job of being married to a cowman, there was considerable physical labor, attached. The ranch women did all their own work. They had to carry water from the nearest well or waterhole and gather mesquite wood from the prairie to make fires. They always had to cook for a passel of men, even when the camp cook was in, and when the cook was out with the herd,

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they had all the hands that were left at home to feed and look after. In addition, they had to keep house and take care of the children, do their own sewing, cleaning, washing, and ironing, and keep the food supply up.

When anybody was sick, they nursed him with competence, skill, and devotion. They kept a supply of simple remedies and first-aid medicines on hand and pulled their men and children through hard sicknesses with little to help them except herb teas, and epsom salts and tallow and kerosene for croups and colds. How they managed to stay up themselves, with all they had to do, nobody knows.

But nothing much brought them to bed but a baby. One case that always stands out in my mind is concerned with a woman who had a premature baby without any assistance at all except two inexperienced cowboys. The baby was born dead and the boys cut the boards off a corral fence and made a crude little box and buried the baby the next day. They thought they ought to have a ceremony but they couldn't think of anything. It was a snowy, blizzardy day and they just gritted their teeth and dug the grave in the frozen ground and buried the poor little thing.

It was five days before a doctor could get out from town, but that woman lived. She just made up her mind to. It was two months before her husband heard anything about it. He was trailing a herd to market and hurrying to get back before the baby was born. Nobody knew where he was so there was no way to get word to him.

This sounds like an unbearable way to live but don't you believe it. Those women were happy. They had a real job and they were valuable. Their men needed them and the country needed them. They stood behind their men until the last breath and every man who made anything of himself out here had one of these fine women backing him up. They

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had to have character to survive the life that was meted out to them. If it hadn't been for these ranch women, this country would never have been settled up and there's better ways of being happy than sitting on a cushion and sewing a fine seam. A man and a woman out here then were two against the world, and nothing really parted them except death.

The ways of doing business in ranching have changed, but ranch people themselves have changed less than any other tribe, I think. They are still rugged individuals with open hands and open hearts. Every time one of these long, tall, lantern-jawed boys with no more hips than a snake and quite a lot of shoulders, with eyes so blue and skin all tanned with the wind and sun and the little crow's feet in his face put there by the unrelenting weather and the problems of life, comes in the store, it makes me feel good all over. I can't actually worry about the fate of the country with fellows like that still around.

"I always thought a ranchman was just a rootin' tootin' son-of-a-gun who could ride 'em and rope 'em and show you how it's done," he said.

"You been seeing too many horse operas," I told him. "You can't believe everything you see in the movies. First and foremost, a ranchman was and is a business man, trying to make a living and supplying one of the country's most valuable commodities. His business is more romantic to everybody else than it is to him."

"But he can ride and rope, can't he?" this fellow said.

"Listen," I said. "A ranchman can do anything that needs to be done."



# 10

## SQUATTERS

“**Y**ou mean people lived in caves out here?” he asked, his eyes bugged out at the idea. “Cave-dwellers?”  
“Course not,” I told him. “They were squatters, and while they wouldn’t have been averse to a cave if they could have found one, they didn’t have any caves to live in, so they dug holes in the ground and put a roof on ’em. They were dugouts.”

“Didn’t it get muddy in there?”

“Yep,” I said. “It wasn’t very fancy, but those boys were fighting to make a home and they just had to use the materials at hand.”

In settling up this country the settlers squatted on four sections of land and it was theirs by right of conquest (that’s the way the ranchers got theirs too) and it was up to the ranchers to oust Mr. Settler out of his pasture. This was done by various and sundry means, some of which brought blood, and all of which established an era that will long be remembered in West Texas. As I told you before, some smart boy from out here went to the Legislature and passed a bill which allowed the country to be broken up into four-section plots, and then set certain dates for the “squatters” or any one else interested to appear at a certain window in the court house.

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The first ones there got the land, so all you had to do to get four sections of land was to be a damn good scrapper and have a well-organized gang to scrap. The ranchers naturally did, and they got most of their land back by letting some of their cowhands line up and whip the eternal hell out of the settlers. For several days before the lawful scrap, you would see some mighty big men drop into town and the night before the drawing, which was usually on Monday, the plan of attack was decided upon. These conferences always took place in the drugstore and, kid-like and all ears, I listened in. In many instances I had an idea of what would be the next move and would arrange my appearance with my bundle of newspapers so that I could watch the flank attack.

A section of land is six hundred and forty acres and four of these sections were well worth fighting for. The same land brings about an average of twenty dollars an acre now and miles and miles of it have hundreds of producing oil wells.

The sheriff and his deputies removed all guns and other weapons from the boys and always charged them not to throw rocks, but many times in those land rushes I've seen a couple of the brethren rolling down the hill in front of the court house mauling hell out of each other with rocks.

The hall in the court house was usually a mess after the smoke of battle had cleared away, and many a cowhand or settler left the hall holding his pants up with one hand and nursing a black eye with the other. Then the rush started at the store. We sold lots of arnica, which is all but unheard of now. The battlers fairly bathed in witch hazel to reduce the bulging places where some boy on the opposing side had placed a well directed kick.

It took this country several years to get used to the fact that a few men just could not own it all. Many ranchmen claimed pastures that covered as much as two hundred square

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miles. Later on those from farther east who wanted to try their hands where there was no malaria and where they could get a new start came in and squatted on these acres.

Of course, the land never did belong to the ranchers. It wasn't fenced and was open range. It had never been really paid for by anybody except the boys who fought at the Alamo.

These "shoe and stocking" men, as they were called by the rancher who wore boots, began to seep into the country and build barbed wire fences, and these danged spindly wire things with murderous barbs on them seemed to be all over the place. Men who for years had taken the shortest distance between the points without anything to stop them now had to ride around some nestor's fenced enclosure to get where they were going and they didn't like it. It smothered them and cut off the view. They had been raised in the open with nary a thing to obstruct their vision or their path. A fence was just foreign to their nature and if a herd got tangled up in one, they were a bunch of gone cows.

However, like most things that you come by purely by the right of conquest, the ranchmen had a hard time keeping all the territory they claimed. They got this land away from the Indians and killed off the Indians to keep it, and they still had a lot of fight left in them. They had won every battle they had fought for years, except maybe one with another cow outfit who stepped over a natural boundary to run cows in another man's valley. But these usually ended in an amicable settlement over a bottle of whiskey in the saloon, when the offending ranchman who had been running his cattle in a "swiped valley" took his herd out and put it in another valley. The second valley, of course, was the undisputed possession of still another ranchman, who had swiped it from the state. The land didn't really belong to anybody

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and at that time it looked like we might declare war on Mexico again to make them take the darn stuff back. After a few drinks, the ranchman usually decided that if the whole damn United States didn't belong to them, they at least had a long lease on it and plagued if any no-count East Texas croppers were going to do them out of it.

So the barbed-wire, shoe-and-stockings men were powerful unpopular. Who ever heard of a fellow having to take a whole herd of cattle around some other gent's outfit to get them where they were going, and another thing, how could you get water when the waterholes had a damn fence around them? It was an insult!

Some of the larger outfits had the foresight to realize that the barbed-wire invasion of the nestors was not only going to become fashionable but permanent, so they went to town and bought themselves some cedar posts and started stringing wire of their own. Sometimes they would fence in a little pasture that would turn out to be fifteen miles square. Possession of this land was eventually settled by the rushes, but the ranchman who had had the initiative to fence it, usually managed to keep it because he had enough horsepower in his manhandlers at the court house when the rush season opened to enforce his possession.

However, some of the boys just naturally resented the barbed wire especially when it didn't belong to them. They hadn't put it there in the first place, but it gave them a good idea. They loathed it and they had always done something about what they hated. Their war wasn't anything that was exactly planned. It was just kind of like General Forrest in the Civil War. Every fellow had a little something to do during the next week or ten days and he did a nice job of it. The whole atmosphere was pervaded with the odor of smoke of prairie coal (cow dung to you) mingled with the

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smell of blazing cedar. Everybody was burning cedar posts except the nestor who had lost the posts. Cowlots a hundred miles away began to be fenced in with second-hand barbed wire.

It was an era of great prosperity. Everybody except the suffering few who were squatting on the land had a good pair of wire-cutters.

As soon as these modern refinements in ranching, copied from the nestors, showed up, men who had always been very prompt about branding their cattle now had bathrooms in their house and developed that lazy feeling. The have-nots of the time decided to have, so whenever they were riding along a fence and noticed a calf without a brand, they cut the wire and started a herd of their own which gathered momentum like a snowball. Some of these people have emerged as among the best-known and best-loved Christian families in this country.

Well there was a lot of hell-raising in this time, but the settlers didn't take, "No," for an answer. They kept coming and they managed to stay, no matter what went on and by and by, cotton got to be a crop. When the cotton came, the cattle drifted on, the wire-cutters settled down, though none of them ever admitted it. Right now some of their sons can be found riding a plough right down through the very pastures that were fought over by their fathers when the land belonged to anybody who could take it and keep it. In those days, nobody really wanted it, except for the use of the little stubble of grass which adorned it like the first beard of a sixteen-year-old boy. A little grass now and then won't come to much, but when you have a little grass over a range that is five or six hundred miles square, without any limitations, you can readily see why the cattle and the men behind them

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were drifters. It was a long time between food and drink for both of them.

The line between the actions of an animal and a man isn't too broad. A cow usually tries to live clean, but a man, if he lets his greed and lust run away with him, crawls back toward the primeval slime. But he can't win, any more than a wire-cutter could. Wire-cutting is going on now but it's world-wide in scope and every barb has hanging from it a mass of human flesh.

The ranchmen who were on the level and were not up to trying to build an empire, learned things from the settlers and in time became settlers themselves. The rest of them passed out of the picture. The empires crumbled and were divided up and homes began to populate the prairies. When a man has established a home on his land, then he will sure enough fight and die for it. In the last analysis, that's about all there is that's worth dying for. A lot of folks died in the Old West for less important reasons.

The first farmers out here didn't try to raise cotton but confined their agricultural experiments to planting patches of feed which brought little or no money. They had to live by other odd jobs, such as freighting and gathering up and selling buffalo bones which covered the prairies, and working around on the big ranches when the ranchmen would let them. But then some settler had the nerve to plant cotton and when he got a bale together, there wasn't any place closer than Colorado to gin it. But he had raised a bale and that gave everybody hope and impetus. Inside of ten years, cotton had pushed the cattle clear back over the Cap Rock.

The squatters never were as dramatic and colorful as the ranching men. They were just kind of dogged, determined folks that hung on to what they had set up like grim death. Farming wasn't easy in this country in those times. Not

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even a homemaker can change the weather out here, and we had drouths and burning sun and dry blizzards and swarms of grasshoppers and about everything else known to man which would discourage a farmer, but they made this desert country into an agricultural region.



*The squatters were dogged, determined folks . . .*

Most of the nestors were poor to start with, and they swarmed in from all parts of Texas at the prospect of securing a home under favorable conditions. One man could get four sections of land with the provision that he certify that he intended to make it his home and to improve the land. One fortieth of the price was paid down and the rest had to

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be paid within forty years at a low rate of interest. This was like giving it away and the land-hungry farmers piled their families in wagons, tied their household goods on, hitched up their poor horses and drove west, with their old hound dogs trotting underneath the wagon. When they got the land they didn't have the capital to build houses, so many of them lived in dugouts in the clay hills for years. The dugouts usually had a drop curtain over the opening to serve as a door, made of bran sacks or anything else that they could find.

The inside was a mess of pots and pans, one or two chairs, a box for a table, and a dirt floor. The lighting system consisted of a tallow candle, placed in an old bucket lid, or in the more prosperous dugouts they had a kerosene lamp, which, of course, had to be burned anytime they wanted to see because the flap door was the only exit to the outer world and they had no windows. When it did rain, the place usually got wet, the rain blowing down the doorway to form a little pool of water on the floor. The beds were rolls of bedding that were thrown on the floor and used until they got to smelling so bad they had to go out for air; then they were thrown on the top of the dugout and were weighted down with rocks to keep them from blowing away.

I've often been asked by those in other parts if these squatters had children. Of course they did. They came at the regular intervals and if they survived they were good enough to found what we now call our great civilization. Squatters had visions and lived on prospects, a few beans, corn meal, and on Sunday may have had a little sowbelly to flavor their beans.

When they did get started they built shacks that were at least on top of the ground, and in the better circles they had a "one-holer" in the rear, about four hundred yards from



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the back door, which wasn't patronized too much as it was too far away and the bushes were closer.

Then they got a cow and some chickens and the cow country began to fade out like an old maid at a mother's convention. It was through.

Their children grew up half-wild and the privations these families suffered would hardly be survived today, but they didn't squeal much. They put up with the opposition of the cattlemen with hard-faced stoicism, slept with their guns, and toughed it out along whatever lines there were.

I guess this sort of accounts for the fact that a lot of folks out here have still got plenty of iron in their spinal columns and don't take anything lying down. This country, and every other country, was settled by men and women who didn't know how to give up.

"There ain't nothin' wrong with living in a hole for awhile if you have to, long as the sky above you is free," I told him. "Plenty of Americans got used to it in foxholes on the battle fronts. Some of their ancestors came out of dugouts, and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Americans have always been willing to be put to a lot of inconvenience to make and keep their homes."

# 11

## CRITTERS

“**D**id you ever have any trouble with rattlesnakes?” my friend asked me.

“No sir,” I said. “Being sound of wind and limb and equipped with good eyesight I never had any trouble at all with rattlesnakes. However, I may have clipped a few minutes of the world’s record on the mile after exchanging glances with one of these critters.”

One time I was riding on a train from Baltimore to New York (it’s the only time I’ve ever been up there, but I like those damn Yankees) and I was sitting behind a couple of boys. One of them had been down this way somewhere, and was relating his wild experiences. When he got in the middle of them I reached up to see if I were sprouting horns and felt the seat of my pants to see if I wasn’t developing a longer tail than the original. Anyhow, during the wild experiences this boy had had was one about being “chased all day by a rattlesnake.” Since rattlesnakes and I have been in this country years together I felt that it was time to defend my friends, but I just kept still and let the boy run on. He said that the chase went on for hours, and if the train hadn’t stopped when it did, I reckon the chase would have advanced into years.

Rattlesnakes don’t chase anything except small or large animals for food. They never hunt anything except a full

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belly. They never strike unless disturbed. They always rattle in time to give anything or anybody time to beat it unless it's dark, and they rarely ever strike unless stepped on.

Rattlesnakes grow to be about as big as an average man's wrist, but those are the big 'uns. The small rattlers are about the size of a man's two thumbs. They hang around rocks and crevasses mostly, where mice and other small animals make their homes, and they raid prairie-dog holes and rabbit's nests after their young. They will climb a tree after a bird's eggs or young birds. They "hibernate" and go blind and crawl in caves or holes for the winter. The first warm days of spring usually bring them out on the rocks to bask in the warm sunshine. I've seen pictures of one hundred and fifty that were killed in one den in the cave district with a blast of dynamite, southeast of Big Spring about four miles. (We still have got plenty left in case you want to get one.)

When a rattlesnake "strikes," he coils his body and his forked tongue licks out. It takes a week or ten days for him to build up enough poison to "kill" a man or animal, hence you hear of snakes biting folks and not hurting them much. But most people who are bitten by snakes die of fright anyway.

Don't get the impression that I'm in love with rattlesnakes. I'm as scared of them as ever, but we have had several men and boys out here who got forked sticks to place over the necks of the snakes while they reach down and pick them up and put them in sacks and bring them to town to sell to museums and parks. I've seen some six feet long that were pretty big but I've the same respect for the small ones as for the large ones. One rattle from his beads (if you have ever heard it — you won't forget it as long as you live), and you are sold on the idea of moving on in the opposite direc-

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tion. All rattlesnakes want are their rights and as far as I'm concerned they can have them.

Even rattlesnakes have been overestimated. A customer came into our store about twenty years ago and I was busy at the time. He waited until I got through with a customer and then he stepped up and said, "Can you get a doctor for me?" I told him that I'd get one right away and asked him what was the matter. To my surprise he said, "Reckon I'm going to have to clean out that barn of mine. A damn rattlesnake bit me on the hand a couple of hours ago." After a while he added, "I'm getting tired of the durn things bitin' me. This is the third time I've been bitten by a rattlesnake in the last two or three years." He wasn't nearly as excited as I was when I finally got the doctor, and if the town hadn't been "dry" at the time I'm afraid that I would have had to have a shot of the well-known and largely used "snake remedy," though I hadn't been near a snake.

It seems that Mr. McKinnon (that's his real name) had been bitten so much and so regularly that he had evidently built up an antibody against the poison and it didn't hurt him much when he was bitten.

The McKinnon story is true and I see him every once in awhile now and marvel at his calm disposition. If there is anything that will make a man kind of "get high behind" I'd select a good-sized snake bite to be the thing that would stimulate action.

This country is full of rattlesnakes but not as full as some stories. We have a few in town yet, but it ain't so healthy for them here and they are as scared of us as we are of them — nearly.

A rattlesnake with his belly full of prairie dog or rabbit is about the most unwieldy thing on earth and he will sleep

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for a whole day without moving. He couldn't take any prize in a style show either, his stomach is just plain "vulgar."

Every once in awhile, some newcomer will ask me if I've ever seen a real wolf. Yep, I've seen plenty of them, and have seen them running down Main Street when I was a young kid peddling papers early in the morning.

The coyote (West Texas wolf) is a small variety, known in these parts as harmless, and I hate to have to tell you, who have heard stories and seen pictures of him actually destroying men and women and children and even horses, that he'll never get any closer to a human being than he is forced to. There has never been any record of a coyote attacking a human being, and they are about as harmless as any pet dog would be as far as being a "bad hombre." I'll say that in their defense.

But when it comes to being a sneak and a coward and a damn thief, I think that second to the human race, a damn mangey coyote will do more real chicken-stealing than any darky that ever existed, and that's a broad assertion. A coyote can sneak into a chicken coop or where sheep are penned and kill more in less time than can hardly be imagined, and that's the reason why they have such a bounty on their heads.

For the benefit of those who have never seen one, they are about as large as an underfed collie, gray, with a long inquiring nose, gray-green eyes and a long angular jaw. They are built for speed, and use it. If you don't think so, ask some of the cowhands who try to throw ropes on one.

Coyotes are probably the only animals that read the human mind. They are so smart that they seem to know exactly when you go to bed and take advantage of this by rampaging around the house to get a chicken or two. But

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don't let anyone tell you a durn coyote is bad. He is too smart to be vicious.

We did have another gentleman out here, before he was placed on the shelf with the buffalo and the mustangs and the antelopes, that commanded the respect of everyone. This large gray gentleman's name was Lobo, and he did have the deference of all the animal kingdom, including man. I've never heard of him jumping on a man unless it was in defense of his home and babies, and a man still does that.

The lobo weighs around a hundred pounds, will attack only when he is hungry, and then will kill a young colt or a yearling calf or anything else that appeals to his fancy, in a very few minutes. He is very destructive and mean and not afraid of the devil himself. I heard many stories about the loboos when I was a kid, and saw a few of them, but I never did hanker for any close contact with a lobo. However, I still believe that they will leave you alone if you leave them alone, and that's more than we can say about each other.

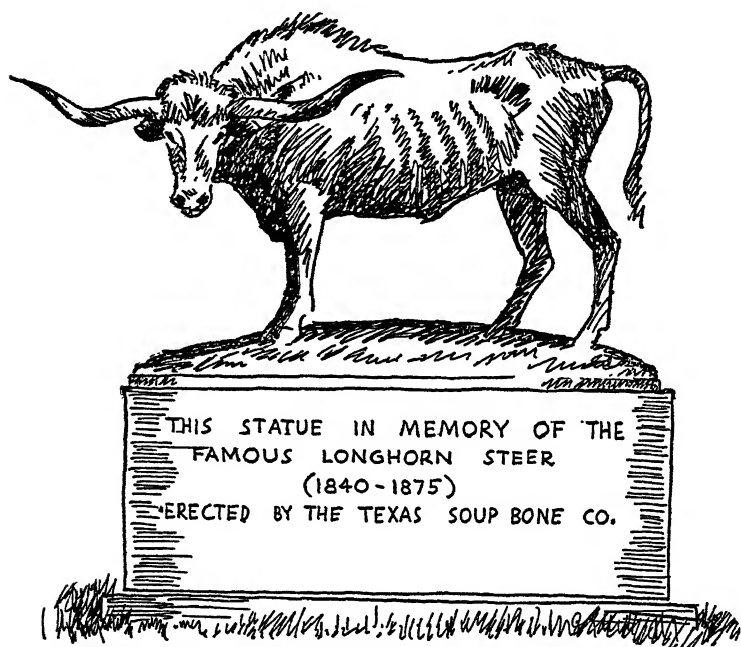
The last of the loboos happened a long time ago, but he was plenty good as long as he lasted, and died game, leaving a trail of calves' blood behind him. We may have a few left out here, but they are smart enough to keep in hiding.

Now we come to the famous Texas longhorn steer. It was his passing that really made a lot of folks, who didn't know him, burst into tears. This highly publicized animal was probably the biggest farce that has ever existed on the Plains. When I came here, that gent was practically gone, and as far as value was concerned, his value lay in the advertising that he gave the Plains, because as a meat producer he was nil. There wasn't over fifteen cents worth of meat on him, and that had to be soaked and beaten before it could be chewed. All I can remember about Mr. Longhorn

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is that he was about the biggest mass of soup bones ever accumulated under one hide.

Yes, his horns were four feet from tip to tip, and he was a great big outfit, so tall that he looked like a horse from a



*... the biggest mass of soup bones ever accumulated  
under one hide.*

distance. He was as mean as hell, and all the boys respected his horns. He was certainly far from winning a beauty contest, however, and what kind of breed he was is still a matter of considerable conjecture. I'm sure his mother was going over the plains and met a traveling man and they established an illegitimate heir that looked like the devil, and it ought to be a lesson to us.

They had to be driven even after the coming of the rail-

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road, because they couldn't get their horns through a car door. Four or five couldn't be placed in a car anyway, without a lot of bruised cattle as the result.

Every once in a while we have a tourist from the East, who asks us how in the world the cowboys ever have time to milk so many cattle, and all we can do is assure him that the cattle that bring the better prices are steers and don't require too much milking, and then we refer them to Webster as to what a steer is.

So when you hear about the passing of the long horned cattle, don't weep too much except for the fact that we have lost one of our traditions, and not a very practical one at that. I'm sure that in the 80's, when the herds were driven long distances, the longhorn was the only steer that could take it, and all I can say is that the boys and gals in the East must have been hard up for meat, because after a steer is driven a thousand miles and has eaten whatever the land has to offer, I'm sure the meat isn't exactly tasty.

The last of the mustang horses that roamed the plains were rounded up and captured along the spring of '98, but one blue stallion escaped and outran every effort of capture until the fall of the same year. The reason I remember the facts of the case so well, was because the cowhands, who finally cornered him in a canyon and got their ropes on him, were badly bitten and pawed, and it took a lot of first aid to make these cowhands look like human beings again.

That mustang stallion was a light shade of blue and was plenty tough. He absolutely refused to be corralled and when he was finally driven into a pen, he went over the top rails and was soon loose again, but was recaptured, and after another battle was subdued enough to be tied up to the fence of the corral. When the time came to ride him, several of



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the old-time bronc busters refused to qualify, and finally they got a cowhand who said he would take him on. It took the combined efforts of about half of the cowhands in the country to place a saddle on him, and they never did get a bridle put on, but they finally got the girth fastened, and the cowhand mounted him by climbing over the fence and getting on as he went by.

This procedure didn't suit the blue stallion at all, and he raced for the corral gate with his human cargo and started across the hills toward his habitat. The cowhand was the object of some of the fastest bucking that folks in these parts had ever seen. He did more different steps and twisted around the country in such new and fancy twists, that he finally left what remained of the cowhand sitting comfortably in a patch of cactus. Then, with the saddle under his belly, the gentleman in question proceeded to pitch and scrape through the brush until the saddle was so twisted and torn, it didn't even look like leather. When they brought the cowhand down to the doctor's office, they removed enough cactus thorns from the seat of where his pants used to be to fill a nice sized vase, and it was several months before said cowhand could sit down in any comfort. This and his other bruises made him remember "Old Blue," as the stallion was called, for many years.

The stallion was captured again and finally gave in and was pulling a meat cart up to the time of his death many years later, but he was always as mean as the devil and never failed to kick or paw anything within his range. He was the last of the wild mustangs in this country and was the original "ring-tailed tooter." Believe me, he had the respect of everyone who passed within his range. His shots were very accurate and always well placed, and if he lived here

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today, I'm sure that insurance companies would cancel the policy of any man who associated with him in any way.

Mustang horses, when they were finally caught, were never what you could call "parlor ladies or gentlemen." They resented civilization and believed in fighting for their rights and were very democratic about it. They would paw, bite, jump on, hit in the clinches, and use the rabbit punch. It was possible to get them so that they could be saddled, bridled, and finally ridden somewhat when they were too tired to pitch, but when they got rested and their battery recharged with a few mouthfuls of good, long, green grass, the show was on again everytime anybody got near enough to the fence to throw a rope on one of them without giving the horse a chance to charge.

They were starved into submission, but, by golly, no man alive can say that he ever did tame a mustang. They were born with their minds made up to roam the range, to scrap it out with those who interfered with their personal rights, and they were finally killed by hunting parties, because they used their propaganda to keep the tame horses all stirred up. Every time a cow pony would get in with a bunch of mustangs, it was like the old story about Dog Tray. The range pony got to having some bad ideas and would finally run off with the mustang herd. The cowman finally killed them all out, but the wild burros and the wild mustangs died without giving in one damn inch. They had a little something in their blood that some folks I know would be better off with if they could get it as a transfusion.

Man is a lot funnier than a mustang. Everytime a man gets his foot set in somebody's country he wants to kill off everything the other man has, including his women and children, the way we did the Indians.

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After it's all over and the dust settles, there isn't anything as funny as the expression on the face of a cowhand who has been bucked off by a little horse that looks as meek and mild as a choirboy during the service. But like choirboys after the service, he wasn't exactly what he was supposed to be.

Walt Cousins of Dallas, who rode herd over this country way back yonder, owned a horse one time that he finally had to give up and admit was the best man. He said to me one time that if the devil could take that darn horse to hell with him he certainly would be adding to his collection. He told me that that horse could pitch more ways than a Chinaman could write. One time a man from Ringling Brothers' show happened to be coming through the country when he was trying to govern that mount, and the boy from Ringling Brothers, who thought Walt was showing off a trick horse, offered him a contract to go with the show and do that stunt twice a day. All Walt was doing was his best to stay on the durn cayuse.

Walt said that the first time he mounted that animal that he threw him so durn high he saw the court house steeples in three of the adjacent counties, the nearest one of which was about thirty-eight miles away. And that each morning he got a glimpse of many stars that you can't see when you are standing on the ground. He said that when the horse pitched, if you held tight to the bridle reins they would stretch out until they were ten feet long when they are normally four, and that many times the horse was home fifteen minutes before he hit Mother Earth.

When I first remember Big Spring, the plains around here were alive with antelope — great herds of beautiful, swift, soft-eyed creatures. I never saw anything prettier than a

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bunch of these dainty-legged beasts grazing on the prairie. They were just right with the scenery and it's a crime that we didn't have enough sense to preserve them for they were harmless and decorative and shy. There's one remnant of a herd left out here and I hope the man that owns them will shoot any and everybody that levels a gun at an antelope. They're as pretty as paint and are a real talisman of the Old West.

The buffalo were all gone by the time I remember Big Spring but their bones were stacked around whitening on the plains and it's a pity to think of the millions of head which were needlessly slaughtered. Most of them were killed for their hides alone and all that meat went to waste. It looks like some of the pioneers didn't have any more sense than people do now. Buffalo hides and buffalo grease were about the only items salvaged from that carnage. The hides were shipped out and used for all kinds of things and the grease was a kind of tallow which was supposed to have great medicinal effect. When messed up with several other oils it was purported to be good for what ailed you, no matter what it was. If your sense of smell wasn't too dull, you could always spot the man who was engaging in buffalo grease therapy and rubbing his chest with that concoction. I am sure it did keep the germs away because it kept every other living thing at arm's length.

They were still gathering up the buffalo bones in my youth and shipping them in carload lots to sugar refineries where they were used in this work. Now even the bones are all gone. About the only buffalos we have got left are on a nickle, and there are probably not nearly as many of them as there used to be wild buffalos, roaming the staked plains.

Prairie dogs are little animals that live in a hole in the ground and subsist on grass roots. They belong to the

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gopher family and look a little like a squirrel at a distance. Whenever they start to run into their holes (and they always run into them when they see you coming), they flirt their tails around before they go down. A prairie dog wasn't good for anything on earth except to dig up holes in the prairie that many a good horse got his foot caught in and broke his leg before he could get it out, and when a horse breaks his leg, you have to shoot him. Besides, the prairie dogs propagated faster than rabbits and they ate up the grass, so there wasn't anything to do except to get rid of them. The rattlesnakes helped out on this as they had a special taste for prairie-dog meat and when they would slide into a prairie-dog hole, sometime, there would be the durndest fight you ever heard of, but the snake nearly always won. Prairie dogs made good target practice for the cowhands, especially if the cowhand had lost a horse by having him fall in a prairie-dog hole. After this a puncher always felt mighty murderous about prairie dogs and it looks like the milk of human kindness where they were concerned had kind of clabbered in his veins.

We had jackrabbits too — still do, of course. Jackrabbits are a form of animal life that have even got the scientists puzzled. I always thought jackrabbits were a cross between a kangaroo and a mule. He has hind legs like a kangaroo and I don't know anything about a kangaroo's speed but I could write a book on what I know about the high-g geared jackrabbit. The gentleman or lady, as you wish, has ears that remind you of a good all-around jackass, from whom he got his name.

The jackrabbit may have fights at home with his own kind or his old lady, but he is a rather peaceful creature on the range, until something comes along and he is off in a

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cloud of dust. He is a light fawn color, like most any wild rabbit, but is much larger. When he runs he jumps everything which might get in his way except a two-story building. It's possible he might even do that if a two-story building ever happened to spring up on the range and get in his way.

These jackrabbits multiply as fast as a family on relief. They have several in each litter and they have more litters per year than you can shake a stick at, so they get to be a nuisance. Some folks tried to poison them but they multiplied faster than the poison, so at certain seasons of the year, usually spring and fall, we had what we call rabbit drives. Rabbits are still multiplying so we still have rabbit drives.

Anybody is eligible to take part in a drive who has a few brains and a shot gun, except, of course, the rabbit. Several hundred folks gather around the starter, who gives them the idea. Then they string out over yonder about a mile and form a circle, each man ten feet from the man on his right and left. Nobody is supposed to shoot any direction except down and especially not to the right or left. At a shot from the starter, everybody starts walking and shooting rabbits toward the center of the circle as he walks. Rabbits are flushed out and as the circle grows smaller the rabbits are completely surrounded and when the last one has been shot in the small circle at the end of the drive, they are counted. Sometimes the deceased rabbits will number as many as two thousand to a section of land, depending on the kind of grazing to be found on the particular section. Rabbits prefer good grazing and a place to produce and hide their many children.

Generally about four sections (six hundred and forty acres to a section) are covered in one day of rabbit-driving. The rancher whose land is being cleared of rabbit life usually

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gives a big barbecue dinner with all the fixins' in the middle of the day. The thought of a large larrupin' piece of barbecued beef cooked on the range, along with the inherited desire of man to get out his gun and kill something, usually brings out a large crowd from town — including businessmen and people who are proposing to run for office the next time they have an election.

Rabbit drives are a great West Texas institution. I am satisfied the Legislature hasn't heard of them yet or they would be outlawed along with horse racing. Shooting rabbits through an advancing circle is great sport. Certain precautions are always observed but after each drive we usually end up with some fellow having birdshot picked out of the seat of his pants. Hardly any humans get killed but it sure is hell on the rabbits. It's not a very pretty idea, but if we didn't have these drives, the rabbits would take over the country and eat up every green thing in sight except the people.

Sometimes rabbit drivers flush something beside rabbits. Every animal in the neighborhood can get trapped in a circle that is a mile in diameter. Last time a wolf was flushed, the big, bold hunters found out a wolf had more on the ball than a jackrabbit. Hence when the wolf started to get through the circle, there was enough shooting to make the hills vibrate like Sally Rand. Another critter by the name of skunk — we call him a polecat — also may get going when the shooting is heavy and he has a little weapon of his own which will make even a load of buckshot turn in its course. But if a skunk is in the circle, he has to be shot too. The act is usually performed by holding the gun with one hand and the nose with the other. That particular side of the circle moves mighty fast — in fact they form a flat side that the other boys have a hard time keeping up with.

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Rattlesnakes come in for their share of excitement too. When they get in the family circle they have to be run over or run around and its always a tossup between the two. I never saw a man who didn't automatically start running the opposite direction when he met up with this gent. It's a great speed stimulator. People who have been limping in both legs for years can cover a hundred yards in twelve seconds. Coming across a rattlesnake can mighty near ruin a rabbit drive for you. When you are in the circle, you have to keep up with the man on the left and right of you, it's part of the rules, so you have to shoot the snake and keep going, but you are no good for the rest of the time. You keep expecting that snake's brother or sister to take up the feud, so you get as nervous as a bride.

A few badgers get caught in the trap and badgers are not afraid of anything. They can back up to their holes and knock the stuffing out of any dog that has the temerity to approach near enough. In fact, one good healthy badger, with plenty of vitamins, can whip as many dogs as he can lure to attack him. One good swipe with a badger's right or left and the dog is turned inside out, which places the dog in a very uncomfortable position. You have to shoot a badger to get rid of him.

A lot of field mice are started along with the other animals. They are bright little tricks — not worth shooting at and too little to hit, but they are not particularly pleasant to have running over your feet in a snake country.

More rabbits get scared to death than shot in a rabbit drive because the landscape is given a good plowing-up with bird shot. It usually takes two or three shots to hit a leaping jackrabbit with a nervous gunner at the sights. Many of the young rabbits are taken home by the hunters and used for meat. It has been said of West Texas that you can always



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tell when times are good because a jackrabbit can run down Main Street without three men chasing after it on foot.

Another critter which is kind of peculiar to our part of the world is the road runner or chaparral. He is a long-legged, bright-eyed member of the feathered kingdom who doesn't make use of his wings much. He just walks but he can walk faster than a man. The way he sprints down the road in front of you is a caution. These birds are fighters too, and don't think anything of attacking a rattlesnake. That kind of a fight is not a pretty thing to see, but a road runner can peck a rattlesnake to death.

We had a lot of other wild animals here in the old days — mountain lions and panthers and various kinds of cats. A panther screams just like a woman and when you hear one crying in the night, it is a sound so full of distress you want to put your fingers in your ears. I never met a panther face to face, and I wouldn't want to. They're pretty things, when they're dead — long slinky bodies and big padded feet. But when they're alive, they're real killers, and they come a' fightin'. We still have panthers out there in the mountains. There's a standing price on their heads.

I reckon I can't omit from the list of critters that scavenger of the sky which we call the buzzard. There's something disgusting about a buzzard, even if he does do a service and keep the carrion mopped up off the Plains. Seems like a buzzard can smell death from a long way off and whenever you see the shadow of his big wing spread on the ground and look up to watch him circle, you know it won't be long before he does a power dive onto a carcass. A buzzard is mighty unparticular in his eating habits. He will eat almost anything that's dead and he looks as disgusting as he sounds, with his rusty dark feathers and ugly bald head.

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"I dreamed about a coyote last night," my friend said wistfully.

"That wasn't a dream, that was a nightmare," I told him. "You got to stop drinking so many chocolate sodas."

# 12

## COME AND GET IT

“Say,” my friend asked, “what’s a wagonyard?” I never saw such a feller for asking questions.

“Well, if you never saw a wagonyard, it’s kind of hard to tell you what one was like.”

“I never even *heard* of a wagonyard.”

That just goes to show you what the present generation is coming to.

“A wagonyard was a kind of a hotel that a man and a horse could both stay in,” I said.

“Sounds terrible.”

“Well, it wasn’t. I don’t know what we’d have done without wagonyards.”

We didn’t have any tourist camps in Big Spring in the nineties. We just had wagonyards. This was where folks stayed who wouldn’t live in Big Spring if you gave it to ’em, but thought it was a nice place to visit. The Cole Wagon Yard was the big one. It was near the Cole Hotel where you could eat if you could afford it, and across the street from the blacksmith shop, which made it mighty convenient. There was a wide gate on the northeast side which was opened for the outfits with wagons when they arrived. On the east side it had a bunkhouse in a two-story shack with bunks for men on the upper floor and downstairs a saddle house to take

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care of all the gear and harness. It was in the shape of a square and covered about a block. Flanking the bunkhouse and all around the edge of the square were stalls for the horses. In the center was an open space where the wagons were parked. On the southwest corner was the livery stable with horses and buggies for rent and to the rear of this was a feed house.

The horses had their meals right in the wagonyard. Feed for the horses was purchased at the regular rate and the guest did his own feeding. Men and horses were both bedded at a cost of about fifty cents per day. The cowboys ate in the boarding houses when not exclusively on a liquid diet.

The Rix Wagon Yard was near the depot. It was the same general plan as the other one and both of them kept busy in their lazy, easy-going way. You never heard of anybody in a wagonyard or anyplace else, being in a hurry, unless it was a dry puncher en route to a saloon.

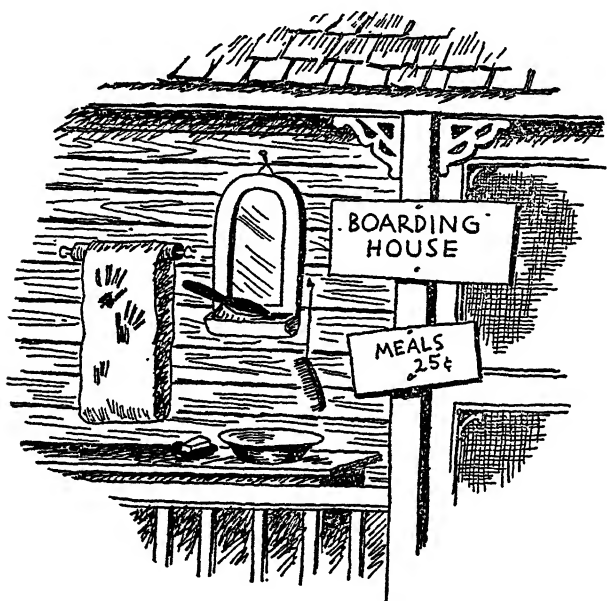
Wagonyards were sociable places. Men got together from different outfits that maybe hadn't seen each other in a long time, and I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of mischief wasn't hatched in them, same as it is now in the big hotels that have taken their places. Wagonyards were hotels for both men and beast and I don't know where you would find anything like that now.

The boarding houses seemed to be the special province of widows in Big Spring. They were all owned and operated by widows and that's peculiar too. You'd think after a woman spends half her life feeding one man she wouldn't want to take on a whole gang of them after his demise. But that's the way it is and why it is fools me. But women as a whole fool me so I don't know why I expect a widow to be any different.

Our boarding houses — we had two — both had great long

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porches where you could sit and wait until supper was ready, and a sign on the porch post — “Meals — 25¢.” I never could understand how either of those women made enough profit at twenty-five cents per meal to stay in business as those were the days when a meal was a meal and not a dab of salad and



*Boarding houses were run by widows . . .*

a cracker. They must have lost money on every hungry cowboy that pushed his feet under the table. But they persisted. They ran their houses like nice places and a man had to look respectable when he sat down to eat. There was always a tin wash basin and a roller towel on a bench on the front porch and a public comb and a looking-glass so there wasn't any excuse for a boarder to go in dirty. They always washed their faces and tried to slick down their hair some before the bell rang.

## COME AND GET IT

The boarding-house ladies were kind of hard put to have unusual menus in Big Spring at that time. Ice was hard to get; it was all but unknown. They kept their butter and milk in a zinc contraption with a wet sheet wrapped around it and the wind blew through the sheet and cooled it off. Meat was scarce in the summer because there wasn't any place to keep it, that is, fresh meat. We always had plenty of meat after the first norther. But in the summer we usually had beans cooked with a chunk of salt bacon. The boys were used to beans and sowbelly and they wouldn't have felt right without them, but when they came to town they favored ham and eggs and real light bread. They got awfully tired of sourdough biscuits and cornpone on the ranch. They liked canned fruit too and they could lay waste more canned peaches than you would believe when they got a chance. Also, they had a terrible hankering after milk. In a land of a million cows there was hardly a milch cow, and a cowboy had to come to town to get a drink of milk.

As I say, these widows didn't have anything fancy but they sure had plenty. The table was always loaded down with whatever there was and in the middle were kept vinegar and tomato sauce, salt and pepper, and other condiments in a contraption that turned around and around. As the cowboys weren't used to this highfalutin' seasoning, they ate it up and would pour tomato sauce and anything else they found on the contraption onto their provender.

I never will forget one old boy who helped himself to Tabasco sauce. He never had seen or heard of it before, so he poured a big dose on his steak. Tabasco sauce is plenty hot. One drop will season a whole meal, but he let the steak have a tablespoonful. Then he stuck his knife and fork into it and conveyed a chunk to his mouth. When he finally got his

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breath back he gave a bloodcurdling yell, reached for his hat, and began to fan the steak.

"Now, damn you, blaze," he ordered the steak.

There was another buck who didn't like rare meat. We didn't have much rare meat in those times. It wasn't safe. You had to cook it all through. We didn't know it was to kill the bacteria but we knew it had to be cooked through to be safe. This cowboy ordered a steak and when it came out it was rare. He called the lady over and said,

"Ma'am, I've seen cows get well that was hurt worse than this one."

Pies and cakes were a great novelty to cowpunchers and they went for them big. Pies were usually made of dried fruit. When it came to these, they developed a real boarding-house reach and you don't know a reach until you see a cowpuncher's. They were nearly all long and lean and hard arms on the general architecture of an orangoutang.

As soon as their money ran out they went back to the ranch and were once more at the mercy of the camp cook. These cooks usually were not chosen for their culinary ability but because they were new in the outfit and had to start that way. KP on a ranch wasn't any more popular than KP in the army.

Each outfit of five or more cowboys had its own camp cook, chuck wagon, supplies of bacon and beans and sourdough. When the weather was right, they killed a cow for beef or got beef from the kill of some other outfit. The chuck wagon lid was used for a kitchen table where all the cooking was done. The contents of the chuck box usually consisted of a can of lard (always rancid during the summer months), salt and pepper, a few dirty utensils such as a skillet, a coffee pot, a coffee grinder and an iron dutch oven which they buried

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in the sand and piled hot ashes on the top. All the utensils were limited, and wood and water were always scarce. Fuel was gathered wherever it could be found as the outfit moved along. The cook picked up cow chips, mesquite roots and anything else he thought had a reasonable possibility of burning.

The supply of sourdough was in a barrel clamped on the side of the wagon, like the water barrel, and this sourdough was a source of constant worry. Each day some of it was used and then an equal amount of flour and water was added to the mess, so it would ferment and make a yeast dough. The process was continual. It just went on for years and years and would probably have continued into eternity if the barrel hadn't fallen to pieces or the smell got too bad even for the cook. The supply couldn't be allowed to run out so the cook rarely cleaned the barrel, unless he was nearly asphyxiated when he took the lid off. Strange to say, however, when this sourdough was made into biscuits and cooked in that old dutch oven, they weren't hard to take. They were durn good.

Canned sardines, canned salmon, and other tinned foods were laid in when an outfit got to town but these delicacies didn't last very long because they were too expensive and too popular with the hands. The only vegetable was beans. Frijole beans, pinto beans, and just plain beans. These legumes had to be soaked twelve hours before they were started cooking and they had to be cooked as long as possible. Several days was not too long but they hardly ever got that. They were boiled in an iron pot with salt, chili pepper, and sand that just naturally accumulated. Even after they had been soaked for twelve hours and cooked for twelve more, they rattled like shot when they hit the tin plates.

In winter, the meat was hung upon a mesquite bush, if



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the cook could find one. Otherwise, it was suspended from one of the wagon bows by a string to keep the wolves off of it. However, even the top of the wagon wasn't too high for the ants to climb and the ants got to it. Also the flies never failed to find out about a piece of beef.

The camp cook was the one member of the outfit that all the other hands took out their spleen on. They cursed him when they got in after a hard day, calling him everything from a belly robber to more personal epithets which referred to circumstances of his birth. The cook was usually good-natured about it, but when things got too tough he just picked up the butcher knife which was usually pretty convenient to him. The lot of a cowhand never was easy, especially in winter when the blizzards came down, drifting the cattle before them. The hands froze, cursed, and rode and they came in hungry. The cook had a hard time keeping things hot for them but he knew that a cow outfit, like an army, advanced on its stomach, and he did his durnedest to fill up the empties. He managed pretty well. I know one fellow who says he has had indigestion forty years from the cooking of one camp cook back in the nineties but I notice he is still living.

Camp cooks were loyal to their outfits. I talked to one that worked for the Slaughter Ranch, and he told me he had to take to cooking after he got hurt and couldn't ride a horse. But he was willing to cook even, just to stay with the outfit.

I've seen monuments to cowboys and I have seen monuments to cattle and even monuments to horses, but I have never seen any kind of a marble shaft raised to commemorate the man who kept them all going. I think it is about time somebody donated a statue to that old sourdough himself, the camp cook — with a coat of arms, crossed butcher knives

## COME AND GET IT

rampant on a field of frijoles with a medallion of sowbelly and a border of biscuits. He did his best.

I hardly ever think of eating in those days, that I don't get wistful for the smell of bacon curling up from the camp fire on the Plains and the sharp pungency of new ground coffee, mixed with the sweet morning smell of the prairies after the last star has winked into day. You don't get eating like that any more.

"Maybe it's because you don't get up in time to see that last star wink into day," he said slyly.

"How can I?" I asked him, "when you keep me up all night, jabbering."

# 13

## TENDERFEET

“**D**id you ever hear of the Earl of Aylesford?” my quizmaster asked me one night.

“Anybody who ever got close to Big Spring has heard of him,” I answered. “He was about as close as we ever got to the crowned heads out here.”

I guess the most spectacular tenderfoot that ever came to Big Spring was the Earl of Aylesford. He came along before my time, but his name is legend and everybody knows about the Earl of Aylesford who arrived in this primitive outpost of civilization in the eighties on the T & P. You can imagine the expressions on the faces of the unkempt cowpunchers when the train stopped and it looked like a summer excursion had arrived, but it turned out to be the Earl of Aylesford, his retinue of servants (some people say he had fifty), and appropriate quantities of luggage.

Nobody knows exactly what an English peer was doing in Big Spring, but he seemed to have left Europe under a cloud of considerable proportions. He had been educated in Cambridge and was a close personal friend of the Prince of Wales, who later became Edward VII. He had accompanied the Prince on his trip to India and owned some of the special guns which were made to order for the Prince to hunt with in his colonies. Money was lavishly spent and the Earl had

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accumulated debts that ran into millions and besides, he seemed to have got into a mix-up with his wife.

Anyhow tradition has it that he came home from a war (one of those numerous English wars) and found his wife in a situation in which he was an "also-ran." Things were so bad that a divorce (which was almost as unheard of in England at that time as it was in Big Spring) set in, and the Earl of Aylesford gathered up all the money he could lay his hands on and beat it for the great open spaces of the new land.

Some say he wanted to found a new estate for his two daughters, because he had no son to succeed to his peerage. The Earl heard about Texas while he was sitting round some bar in New York and decided to come here. He got in touch with John Birdwell, a Texas Ranger, bundled his servants, dogs, and carloads of baggage on a train and came down here to kill off the buffalo, antelope, and Indians. When he got off the train and marched up to the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Big Spring, he couldn't get a room for himself, much less his retinue, so he said to Mrs. Duggan, the proprietor, "Madam, how much do you want for this hotel?" A figure which was twice its value was named and Aylesford said, "I'll take it." That man really had the makings of a Texan. When he couldn't get the cut of meat he wanted in the meat market, he bought the meat market and raised the standard of the steak. The same thing happened with a saloon and a blacksmith shop.

He took a notion he would like to own a saloon one night, so he paid six thousand dollars for it and invited everybody in town to step up and have a drink on the house — in fact, to have as many drinks on the house as he could hold. All night long and most of the next day every man in town indulged in free liquor, with the Earl of Aylesford acting as

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one of the bartenders. There never has been such a stew or so many headaches all at one time in Big Spring since.

The Earl was aided and abetted in his ranching career by Jay Gould, the railroad tycoon, who drove all over West Texas with him looking for the proper spot. He finally bought three sections about twelve miles out of Big Spring and built a ranch house. The house was a story-and-a-half high and was anything but a castle. It was made out of unpainted boards and had a wide hall running all the way through it with eight or nine rooms opening off of it and so many guns it bristled like an arsenal. The walls were covered with rifles, shot guns, revolvers, derringers, cartridge belts, game bags, and spurs, to which eventually were added the heads of buffalo and antelope that he killed.

No sooner was the Earl settled than his two brothers, Clement and Daniel, came tearing over from England with five more servants, twenty horses, a coach and a dogcart, both of which were highly foreign to Big Spring. They had more baggage.

The Earl never seemed to have any mind to raise cattle on his alleged ranch but he had a big horse barn and two acres enclosed in wire fence where he kept his dogs in and the cattle out. The most impressive monument on his ranch was a pile of empty whiskey bottles as big as a haystack. The Earl took his whiskey straight and he took it often. As many as seventeen drinks were charged against him in a saloon at one sitting. He bought a half a gallon of whiskey every day and often placed it out with a few bottles of gin extra. He is said to have carried his whiskey well, anyhow he carried it.

In fact, the Earl seemed bent on drinking himself to death and before long he did so. He lived in Big Spring about four years and finally departed this life after a tremendous Christmas party at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, which was his

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town house. Everybody in town was invited to the party, from which the Earl never recovered. When he died he had about seven hundred and fifty dollars left and that was hardly enough to pay the way of his remains back to the ancestral home. But they sent him back in a metal casket, watched over by his favorite valet.

The principal trouble that the Earl of Aylesford had as a tenderfoot was that he was equipped with entirely too much cash, a commodity which was no more plentiful than rain in Big Spring, and for sometime the boys around town methodically separated him from it, especially when he was in a buying mood and wanted to own a hotel or a saloon or something. However, he was a free-hearted Englishman and he became very popular with the local citizens. Anybody who gives enough away can be popular. He gave away all the liquor he couldn't drink himself and that binds a man to you. He won the respect and confidence of the cowboys in the most remarkable manner. They would spill their blood for him as quickly as he would open another bottle for them, and there were quite a number of shooting scrapes among quick-draw boys over some real or fancied slight on the Earl of Aylesford's character and reputation.

I never saw the Earl of Aylesford but I wish I had. He was supposed to be a tall, strong, robust man with a fine figure and distinguished manners. Whenever I think of a tenderfoot, I try to imagine how it must have seemed to him away out here in this wild and untamed corner of the earth, after a life spent in the courts of Europe.

Of course, we had a lot of less glamorous tenderfeet and it was considered great sport to get them on half-broken horses and otherwise devil the poor things to death with practical jokes. The sheriff was always willing to be a party

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to these elaborate plans and didn't think anything of arresting a man for a bank robber or something and letting him cool his heels in the court house all day, just for the hell of it. It didn't do a tenderfoot any good to complain about such horseplay. The only way to keep his life worth living was to enjoy the joke and buy drinks for the crowd. If he acted mad, the cowboys redoubled their efforts to make him miserable. After a little of this stuff a fellow who still wore a collar, sure sign of a tenderfoot, became mighty adaptable.

One of the great tenderfoot traditions of Big Spring and surrounding country was a badger fight. The hook in this was that the badger in question didn't have anything to do with that tough customer who could tear up a dog in front of his hole, but was a colloquial expression for a receptacle which spent the night under every well-ordered bed and the days in the sun. It lacked a hell of a lot being an animal. It was made out of china or granite wear and was a necessity in every home.

I don't know the actual origin of the badger fight centering around this popular utensil, but it was customary to pull it on every tenderfoot who showed signs of being able to take a joke. With the opening of this country, we had many strangers from the East and every time we had a stranger, we had a badger fight (the badger being the old pot with a rope in the handle).

As soon as the boy from the East arrived, the cow hands and loafers would gather around him and talk about the way their dogs could kill any man's badger and soon the argument would wax to the boiling point with the stranger sitting on the sidelines holding his breath. He was never in the arguments. When the argument got nearly to the point where guns seemed on the verge of coming into action, another of the cowhands would step in and say that he had a badger

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that could whip "airy pack of hounds in West Texas." Then the betting would start and one of the boys would secretly tip the stranger not to let anyone know about the matter, but it would be a good bet if he would place five or ten dollars on the badger. The tenderfoot always fell for this line and got somebody else to place his bet for him.

At the appointed hour everybody in town who could get loose would go to the badger fight and then the man with his dogs would come from one direction and the man with the badger in a sack, from the other. There was great excitement. The betting got hotter and bigger and better. Then arguments came as to who would pull the "badger" out of the sack. Each side claimed that the other side was cheating and another argument started. So it went for hours and hours, without even a smile from the man with the dogs and his apostles or the man with the badger in the sack and his sinners. Finally they would decide that the best way to settle the argument was to let the stranger pull the badger, so the ground was cleared and a big circle formed with a sheriff and a deputy to keep order and see that the badger and the dogs got a fair chance. Everything got quiet except the howl of the hounds who wanted to know what in the hell was in that sack, and the stranger would grip the rope with both hands and give one great big, he-man jerk, and out would come the "badger", which, of course, was the pot that went under the hotel bed.

Then the boys would start in giving the stranger the razz and would take the money that he placed on the badger and buy everybody in the crowd a drink or two or three until his money was all gone. You can imagine just how a man felt with a week's build-up when he stood there with that pot dangling on the end of a rope and three to four hundred rough folks laughing at him.



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A few of the tenderfeet wanted to fight, but for the most part these boys from the East took to the country and were soon absorbed by its atmosphere and were well liked.

One instance when a badger fight was a dismal failure and caused several of the hands to make Main Street look like a



*The stranger gave a jerk, and out of the sack came the "badger."*

race track was along about 1900. A young fellow stopped in here buying some of the land that was being given away for two-bits an acre (now it is thirty and thirty-five dollars for the same land). Naturally, being rather liberal minded, he drifted into the saloons and pool halls and was soon recognized as a hail-fellow-well-met.

Finally the cowhands decided that the stranger would make a good subject for a badger fight. The stranger listened to the

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boys with his ears pinned back, and fell for everything that they offered. He even selected the ground for the fight down at the lower end of Main Street near the warehouses. He went so far as to pick up the rocks and cans so that the "badger" would have an even break with the dogs. The crowd was about the best that we had had in years and when the stranger kindly consented to "pull" the badger there wasn't a man in the crowd who knew that said stranger was raised on a ranch in Montana and neither did they know that he had posted several men in the crowd and that he was going to have a little show of his own.

The dogs were turned loose and the stranger got a strong grip on the rope and really pulled and when the pot came flying through the air, said stranger threw his hat down on the ground, yanked out two forty-fives and started shooting "pintblank" at the four men whom he had posted in advance and of course they fell down in the dirt and then the wild rush for shelter started. Most of the boys ran off and left their horses and I've never seen Main Street as active as it was that evening. They came running in the drugstore yelling, "That damn Yankee has killed four men down there at the badger fight and is still shooting!" And he was. The alleys and spots behind posts and boxcars were full of tired cowhands who had run as fast and as long as they could.

When the sheriff arrived to take in the stranger who had "murdered" the four men, he found the four men sitting up laughing fit to kill and the damn Yankee was sitting down there laughing with them. You can imagine again how the boys in the saloons felt when the four ghosts, the sheriff, and the murderer came marching into the saloons demanding a drink on the crowd.

I think that was the last big badger fight we had in this

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country — though we did have several minor affairs at various times.

One thing about it, when a tenderfoot had earned his spurs, nobody was more enthusiastic than he was about a badger fight. He couldn't wait for another unenlightened soul to get off the train so he could do the trick himself.

Everybody that came to Big Spring, with the possible exception of the Indians, was a tenderfoot at first, but as soon as a man stayed around here a month or so, he picked up our manners and customs and got to be one of us. Then he was initiated into the fraternity and could plague anybody who came to town after he did by telling him lies, yarns, and otherwise taking advantage of a gullible nature. Nobody could stay tenderfooted long in this country. They either got over it or they lit out for where they came from. There's just no percentage otherwise. Between the climate, the country, and the folks, anybody's foot would get tough soon.

"How long do you think it will take for mine to get tough?" he asked me.

"Well, I tell you," I said to him. "I hear there's going to be a good badger fight down at the Court House tomorrow. How'd you like to hold the badger?"

# 14

## PUT YOUR LITTLE FOOT DOWN

“**D**idn’t you ever have any fun out here?” my friend inquired. “People didn’t just work all the time, did they?”

“Of course, we had fun,” I snorted. “We had more fun than you young whippersnappers know how to have.”

Nobody needs to think we didn’t have a good time and social life out here in these parts. We didn’t have any constant round of gaiety but when we did get to a party, darn if we weren’t able to enjoy it and give it our all.

A cowboy dance isn’t the most beautiful thing on earth but it sure is lively; and sometimes when you get to watching the sets and the sashaying and the do-ci-doing, and listen to that strange shuffling rhythm which makes a square dance and is not possible to describe, along with the wild beckoning of the fiddle and the voice of the caller, then it is beautiful, in the way primitive expressions of happiness usually are.

Our ladies were lightfooted, even if they were the same ladies that stood over a washtub and a hot stove and could shoot down a coyote with one shot and no compunction. They were pretty too — and they never got tired.

Jim Winslow’s four-piece band was in great demand out here. They played all over the plains. When the band started out to Lubbock, which was one hundred and twenty-

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five miles away, on horseback, they let folks along the way know they were coming and stopped off at Gail and Tahoka and made merry in the best barns and stables or anywhere else they could find a place big enough to shake a foot in.

They stopped overnight and played for a dance in every town. There was some kind of mental telepathy accompanying their progress through the country, because there weren't any telephones and the mail hack was the only means of communication between towns; but whenever the Winslow Band got to a wide place in the road the cowboys were there in large numbers, together with a few well-chaperoned girls and some old folks who were not too particular with their feet and still had a dancing spark left in their make-up. The floors were rough and full of splinters and the surroundings were anything but decorative, but the fellowship and understanding was about perfect.

The square dances were still far and away the most popular, but waltzes were beginning to come in and the girls all swooned with joy when the fiddles struck up, "After the Ball Is Over." The "Blue Danube" was a great favorite too. We danced schottishe and many a lively polka. "Put Your Little Foot Down" was the best of all. Nothing is as pretty as a young girl in a wide lawn skirt, "putting her little foot down."

The girls were outnumbered about five to one, so their popularity was legendary. Also their endurance. The men got to rest about four-fifths of the time but the girls danced every dance and the dances lasted all night — sometimes the next night too. The women had no chance to duck or sit one out. Five gallants were standing in line constantly begging the favor of the next one.

The main reason the dances lasted all night was because it was a long time between dances and then, too, the durn

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roads were so bad, where they were any roads, and snakes and skunks made traveling by night kind of undesirable. So they shuffled all night long and when dawn began to come up over the prairies and it got light enough for the cowboys to get going, they unhobbled their horses, pulled off their boots and rested their feet and the horses carried them back to the ranch. The ladies didn't fare so well. They had to soak their feet and doctor a few stone bruises where some gawky cowhand had stepped on them. These itinerant orchestra tours usually lasted about a week and were very profitable to the musicians and folks who sold medicine for sore pedal extremities.

The dances given by the big ranch outfits were planned affairs and we looked forward to them for weeks. Notice was given out in every way possible, because when an outfit had a dance, there was no restricted guest list. Everybody in the country who could get there was invited. They usually lasted two or three days and whole families came and brought their babies and children. The women and kids had the run of the ranch house, and the men slept in the bunkhouse or in their bedrolls on the ground in the yard, what time they had for sleeping. This wasn't much. The women always cooked up a bunch of hams and fried pies made from dried fruit and washtubs full of doughnuts, and the ranch owner barbecued a beef so there was plenty of food.

Everybody dressed up for these more formal affairs. Hands would ride thirty miles to town and thirty miles back to get a haircut, a bath, a new shirt, and their boots shined. The women all had their best dresses on—a new one if possible. They rode in the ranch hack and carried their ball dresses and dancing shoes, or else posted over on a side-saddle with their clothes tied in a bundle behind. They

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had their hair all curled up on curl papers and had been putting buttermilk on their epidermis for days to bleach themselves.

The rancher who gave the dance had to put up the horses and feed them, along with the folks, and at these home af-



*If one got to holding on too tight, they gave her a look . . .*

fairs, the men were required to stay sober. If a cowhand got drunk at such a dance, he was disgraced. There were usually about thirty couples at these ranch dances, but Pa and Ma brought their daughters and the men came in a body, so there weren't any dates, and no traveling of young folks forty miles to a dance together without strict chaperonage. During the dancing the older women sat in a group in a

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corner near the music, gossiping with each other and watching the antics of the young girls with an eagle eye. If one got to holding on too tight they would all give her a look that broke the hold just like a referee in a modern wrestling match.

Everything was chaperoned up to the hilt, but somehow the young folks must have got together in the dim light of the lanterns because we had a lot of weddings and such things can't exactly be arranged by remote control. Sometimes I think the girls themselves had to take the lead in courtship because the men were so shy. They didn't know anything about the fair sex and they used to blush as red as a turkey gobbler's neck when a girl would put her hand on one of their arms to walk off the dance floor. The little things looked so frail and sweet to a cowhand, he was afraid he would break one of them to pieces if he really started to hugging her the way he felt like.

The women usually wore flowered muslin dresses with rosettes and things on them and sometimes white dresses with ruffles made out of embroidery and beading with ribbons run through and a whole bunch of petticoats. Our ladies kept up with the styles the best way they could. They wore puffed sleeves and bustles and plenty of petticoats. Sometimes I think it is a good thing there were five men present to every girl. I don't think a dance could have lasted all night if one fellow had to carry five underskirts and a bustle through every dance. He would have pooped out long before daylight.

The men always managed to get on a coat and wear it during a dance, and they owned a blue serge suit if possible, just for these occasions. This was about the only time you could get a necktie around their necks and they wore their pants legs tucked inside their boots and looked plum civil-



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ized. But every once in a while they would forget their decorum and let out a cowboy yell that would scare the bats out of the roof.

One old boy was warming his boots at the stove one cold night and burned a hole in the side of it. That was a real tragedy, of course, because he didn't have any more with him. But he made a deal with a friend of his — he and his pal took turns wearing the pal's boots, changing in regular shifts, whenever one had a partner. The boots were in every dance but the same man wasn't in the boots all the time.

Lots of times you couldn't hear Jim Winslow's fiddle or Bostick's guitar or the other members of the orchestra (usually four pieces), but you could always hear boots, boots, boots, and they kept time to the flop of the ladies bustle in a way that is hard even to describe.

The drugstore was next to a saloon, and the boys always bought the girls some little something, usually some candy, and later on (after it was declared ladylike to chew it by the Emily Posts of the day) some chewing gum. Always before the dance, the boys gathered at the drugstore and the band gave a little free show for the Christians who, at that time, didn't dance and usually some cowhand would cut loose and sing some song and these boys could really sing (when you found one that could). I've been out here forty-three years and have never heard a cowboy yodel and believe that they would have shot him if he had tried just one time. I still want to shoot these movie cowhands who sing through their noses or yodel, and represent their sacred calling as yodeling. Cowhands hummed to quiet their cattle when they were going up the trail at night but there wasn't any damn yodeling.

The dances in Big Spring were held in the long hall of the court house, Jim Winslow says. After the railroad came,

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the women imported their ball gowns from Colorado and went around in swishing silk. They had these dances about once a month and they were very popular. People came from all over the county. It was convenient, because you could get your shave, haircut, and bath right in town, and during the day you might inhale a little whiskey to last you. Of course, your wobble was well checked when you got to the door of the court house that night and if you even smelled of whiskey, you weren't allowed to pilot a single bustle over the rough floor. Cowhands left their horses at the wagonyard and spent the remainder of the night at a bunkhouse. After the opera house was built, some of the superballs were held there, but they never were as popular. There were too many lights for comfort. The girls could see what they were dancing with and that took some of the joy out of the occasion.

We had other social affairs besides dances, and these were usually put on by the good church women to keep the preachers from starving to death. One of the most enticing of these was the box supper. The boxes of food were packed by the girls with products made by their fair hands and wrapped up very fancy and pretty. They were auctioned off to the highest bidder and brought whatever the cowhands had in actual cash, because when you bid highest for the box, you had to eat supper, practically unchaperoned, with the girl it belonged to. Of course, the eating took place in a large common room full of people, but at least her Ma didn't sit down and have supper with you.

It was supposed to be a dark secret whose box was whose, but if a girl wanted a man to get her box, she would warn him how she was going to decorate it, so he could recognize it by a red bow on the top or some such love sign. Some-

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times it would be a terrible thing for the man, because there would be two boxes with red bows and after he had paid his all, he would find that he was going to eat supper with the deacon's wife. The deacon's wife usually had a heftier box and a durn sight better cooking than a girl who spent more time on the outside of the box than the inside, but that never made up for the absent company.

If a cowboy had a hankering for a girl, he would bid all he had and all he could borrow for her box, and in this way he would convey his interest to her and she could take it up from there. A lot of romances that ended at the altar started at a box supper.

Ice cream suppers were also given by the church women on the court house lawn, as well as bazaars. The bazaars were held in an empty store building and all the ladies would put their eyes out making needlework for it and then sell it to their neighbors and give the money to the church. They held quilt raffles too, and anything else they could think of to keep the wolf from having pups on the preacher's doorstep. Cowhands had so little money it worried them when they got it, and they put it back into circulation as fast as they could. They didn't really need the stuff and thought it wasn't good for anything except to spend as quickly as possible.

We had a railroad band and the T & P encouraged it by making it easy for a musician to hold a job with them. This band paraded at every possible chance and gave band concerts on the court house lawn twice a week and on Sundays in the summer time. Everybody was interested in music and a girl was required to take piano lessons or play a stringed instrument, if her Pa could scrape up enough money for the lessons. About four times a year the music teachers would break out in a recital which bored the boys to death, but they

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went and managed to clap at the right place. Singings were popular. Sometimes they didn't have the right key but they had the right spirit. Barbershop quartettes were in vogue. Big Spring had as many as five at one time. They lacked educated voices but they knew harmony and the volume was fine.

We didn't have too many places to go, so "Jining" was popular. Lodge nights, with their mysterious red and blue lights and the officers of the lodge running around in long, flowing robes (somewhat moth-eaten and smelly) and giving high-sounding degrees gave the men a feeling of great importance. At least they could have a few secrets from their wives there, and the folks who were taking the degrees were deeply impressed.

Sometimes we would have a "Degree Team" come from some other town and put on special work that our local boys couldn't pronounce the words in, then we would go wild sure enough.

Celebrations of any kind were popular—it didn't make much difference what we were celebrating. We would hang out our weather-beaten red, white, and blue bunting at the slightest provocation, get a few firecrackers, and the boys in the shops would stack anvils on top of each other and put some gunpowder in between and shoot the works in honor of any event which we happened to be exposed to at the time — if and when the time arrived, in case the wind didn't blow down the bunting and blow away the gunpowder before we could get going.

We had parades too. Everybody who had a horse or anything else that would roll would hitch up, find an American flag, and "git in the parade." Usually there was hardly anybody left to watch us pass. But we had a fine time tricking

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out the horses in stuff and tying red white and blue bows on those poor embarrassed critters' tails. Of course, the wind blew the bunting around so the horses looked like Pa running for the back yard in his nightshirt.

Ladies rode in the parades too — on their little side-saddles, with every sucker on the street praying for an extra puff of prairie wind to blow up their long riding skirts so we could see an inch above their high-topped shoes and get a glimpse of a cotton stocking. It was plumb shocking but added quite a lot of interest to any parade.

The T & P Band would come straggling up the street, all buttoned up and sweating, puffing and wheezing and trying to blow the crooks out of their horns. They may not have played so good but they sure played loud. I always say what is the use of a brass band if it's not brassy. The T & P Band was good and brassy!

The Parade usually led to the Arbor where the real doin's started. This was the speaking — usually somebody running for office. We all went on to the speaking, though I don't think anybody could remember what it was about by the time it was over. However, everybody was there and that was the main idea. You saw all your friends. Lonesome as our country was, we liked to be together. It takes a good man to stand an awful lot of his own company.

After the speaking one of the reverends would pronounce the benediction and we would all walk a mile or two back home to the water barrel and go to bed, sore but satisfied. The papers would discuss the parade and the speech for days afterward and we would read it like real news.

Parties were given by people at home where we played old-fashioned games like Spin the Plate, Clap In and Clap Out, Going to Jerusalem, and Forfeits. Every girl had a

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Mama or an aunt on hand as a chaperone, however, and that made the house so full of people that little of a definite nature could be accomplished in the way of getting together.

When a couple were engaged, they could go buggy-riding in broad daylight on Sunday afternoon and this was a great thrill. Every girl wanted to get engaged so she could go buggy-riding. Sometimes a whole bunch of couples would start to a picnic with the chaperones riding in a surrey. This way a few buggies could manage to get on the wrong road or otherwise get separated from the immediate precincts of the chaperone.

One couple of my acquaintance managed to make a break like this once but vengeance overtook them promptly.

The dry creek on the road to the Spring had several gyp wells of shallow water. When this water was first drawn, it was extremely cold and had no taste at all, but the result was the same as Epsom salts and it probably had more miles to the gallon than any of the higher grade gasolines.

When I was about fifteen, we had several girls visiting here, and as usual, the boys dropped around to the drugstore and checked the girl's names and sent a note, inviting them to the picnic, receiving in due time the answer, usually in the affirmative. One old boy checked a visiting girl's name, a girl whom he had never seen. He wanted to be nice to the visitor, and invited her to a picnic we were to have at the Spring. It was a hot day in August, and we all carried ice and soda pop and lunches in the buggies, and bugged our eyes out when we got a wee glimpse of a girl's ankle as she got in the high buggies of that period.

This old boy on the way out with this fair stranger managed to get on the wrong road and got lost. About three-o'clock in the afternoon, he came upon one of the gyp wells,

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and not knowing it was gyp water, he drew up a bucket, and both he and the girl drank their fill.

And they started on again, and probably had traveled a couple of miles, when the first pain hit the boy. He stopped the horses and said to the girl:

"Miss Smith, I want you to understand that I'm a perfect gentleman, and I realize that I have never seen you before today, but something that I have eaten has made me terribly sick, and if you will just hold these horses, I'll be back in a few minutes."

With that he started to get out and beat it to some mesquite brush about a hundred yards off the road; but as he got out, it seems that similar pains had attacked the damsel, for she said,

"Mr. White, I expect you had better just *tie* these horses," and she jumped out of the buggy on the other side, picked up her wide skirts, and did the hundred yards on the other side of the road in nothing flat.

The performance was repeated several times before they reached the Spring, but naturally it got better each time as they had more practice.

The facts are true in the above story, but, of course, the names are not Smith or White; however, I'm sure that they haven't forgotten the good old days when ladies blushed.

The drugstore played a right prominent part in courting in those days, due to the stringent restrictions on the young. They had to think up new ways of conveying their emotions to each other and the drugstore helped them out.

"Courtin'" usually started when some young buck made his first overture for a date with some girl whom he had known all of his life, or when the man saw or met a young (more or less) maiden who looked good to him and after being presented, he asked to call and see the family album

## PUT YOUR LITTLE FOOT DOWN

or something. After the matter had been gone over by the Mama and Papa of the girl, he usually got turned down for a date in a note written in perfect English on light blue paper or maybe rose, that had the faint fragrance of the lily of the valley or the cow lot (depending, of course, on how close the cow lot was to the house). Or he was allowed to call and he met Ma and Pa and they graded him. The old folks stayed in the room until ten o'clock, playing checkers, and then they retired and it was time for the boy to go too (if he had any sense) because ten was a scandalous hour for him to be up, much less alone with Sally. However, after a very formal goodnight, the gentleman wound his way down through the mesquites to his home or boarding house, and another West Texas romance had started.

Then the next day, the love sick boy came in the drugstore and handed me a thick note and five or ten cents and I carried it to the maiden. Then, she would get out that perfumed paper again and the poor boy was done sunk. She was practically his.

Large medallions (pictures with gold frames) sometimes as much as a yard long and two feet wide were the vogue then, and when a girl got one of those things to cover the large flowers on the wall paper, she was practically engaged. The giggling beauties of that time would

give each other that knowing nod just as they do today, except their hair was way up in a knot so that they could place the proper emphasis on the aforesaid nod. From back fence to back fence the word would go until it was around the entire town and then it would start back again. Finally, the boy would give her a band ring, but the whole thing nearly



A LOVE-SICK  
YOUNG BUCK

*The love-sick boy came in the drug store and handed me a note . . .*



## PUT YOUR LITTLE FOOT DOWN

always started when he went to the drugstore and bought that picture.

Weddings were held in churches, then as now, if the girl's mother could manage to have her way, but sometimes she couldn't and sometimes the girl up and eloped and then the court house and the justice of the peace made it snappy. Weddings got started early because the couple usually had a long drive back home, and that drive constituted the only wedding tour they had. The cowhand usually had to ransack the county to get his outfit together and sometimes he couldn't find a white shirt to fit him anywhere, and it was supposed to be part of the ritual to get married in a white shirt. He had to beg, borrow, buy, or steal one for his wedding day. His bashful friends usually attended him at the wedding and had to be disarmed and their bloody spurs removed before the ceremony started. But boy, those nuptial knots were really tied. Don't think I ever heard of a cowhand getting a divorce.

Along about 1905 the opera house was opened for its first show, and it was a gala event in the life of the village. Previous to that time, the cowhands hadn't patronized itinerant shows very much, but when *East Lynn* was blared over the billboards, the cowhands came in droves and bought the tickets at the drugstore, and the town was all set for its big première. The boys donned their best Sunday clothes, stormed the barbershops for their haircuts and spent the day getting all set for the evening performance.

*East Lynn* was a sad little ditty. Tears were streaming down the faces in spite of the fact that many bandana handkerchiefs were wringing wet. The boys had never seen a show of any kind, and as the villain got rougher and rougher, finally it was too much for one of the boys who was taking

## PUT YOUR LITTLE FOOT DOWN

the villain literally and who got filled up on the rough stuff being handed out to the fair maiden. He yelled right out loud in the middle of a very tense scene. "Hey there pardner, that's enough of that," and started for the stage. The combination of fighting whiskey and pent-up emotions was more than he could bear. The sheriff had to get him quiet and he finally got him to go outside, but the show was one grand flop because the villain couldn't do his stuff after that as villains should do.

Riding home through a rather stiff norther after the show was over, at the unearthly hour of ten-thirty, and still mad at the villain, didn't help the temper of the cowhands much, and for days and days afterwards, the stock gossip at the drugstore was, "That villain ought to be shot," or "I'll bet he is just as ornery as he was on the stage." Two or three posses collected, bent on tracking the actor down and investigating him, but nothing came of it.

Stock companies stopped at Big Spring along the long route from Fort Worth to El Paso to rest their train-bruised bodies, and we got the benefits by seeing fine shows once in a while. However, the shows, for the most part, were old-fashioned melodrama.

The Woman's Club had nerve enough to bring *Romeo and Juliet*, which was showing to practically empty benches before it was half over. A few drunk cowhands in the balcony furnished more amusement than the scenes that took place on the stage, and were twice as funny and more interesting to most of the audience who were too proud to admit they didn't know what it was all about.

Cowhands had a hard time getting acclimated to the opera. Theirs was the open range where there was no make-believe.

"I guess the drugstore doesn't play such an important part

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in courting nowadays," he said. "You don't keep a list of names for lonely hearts to check, do you?"

"That's one service we discontinued," I said. "Why?"

"I don't know," he said. "I just thought some night it would be nice to buy two chocolate sodas."

# 15

## IT'S A FUNNY THING

“**Y**ou certainly do hear some funny things about Texas,” my friend said. “Whatever it is you get to talking about, a Texan says that Texas has got the biggest or the tallest or the worst or the best of whatever it is.”

“Well, we do,” I said.

“There you are,” my friend said. “You’re probably going to get strung out on the funny things of Texas and tell them to me whether I want to hear them or not.”

“Hell,” I said. “We tell them to each other, and we all know ‘em by heart.”

It’s just because we are so danged proud of this dirt and cactus and mesquite down here, that we never get tired of bragging about our country. We don’t brag much on ourselves but by gum, we can brag on Texas and we do.

Of course, everybody knows that Texas is one twelfth of the whole United States and as big as Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois, put together. In fact, we’ve got one ranch here as big as the whole state of Delaware. It’s the King Ranch down in the Rio Grande Valley. Of course, you may not believe that it’s one hundred and fifty miles further from El Paso to

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Texarkana than it is from Chicago to New York but I invite you to measure it. Nearly everybody has heard that story about the sales manager in Chicago who wired his man in Brownsville to proceed to Amarillo at once, and the salesman wired back, "Go yourself. You're closer than I am."

Folks like to yarn around down here about the size of Texas and the fierce weather. A lot of fabulous stories turn up like the one about the mule team that was heading west on a terribly hot day in September when a norther came up. The lead mule froze to death and the mule at the end of the team died of sunstroke simultaneously.

But we do have some funny things down here that come natural. One is the loco weed. The scientists have never been able to isolate the active principle of this drug though they have been trying for years. It is a harmless looking thing, innocent looking as a grass widow, and it grows right alongside all kinds of other weeds and grasses. But if a horse or cow happens to get a mouthful of it, they soon become addicts, and the things they do and the way they act after they get a shot of this stuff never has been seen anywhere else unless possibly at a convention of businessmen.

Loco, which is Spanish for crazy, makes an animal plum silly. For a few days they act like they had gone somewhere and got to consorting with a dope peddler. Their limbs are full of languor and their eyes are full of dreams. Then they progress to a frisky spell, getting all-fired familiar with everything and everybody. After this comes a season of running fits and the animal will try to run over anything at least three times before they give it up as a bad job.

A cow hasn't got too much sense anyhow and when a cow or a steer gets a mouthful of loco, she is a ruined gal, and it is best to kill her or him, as the steer may be called — depending on where you live (everybody who comes here from

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the East calls anything that wears cowhide "she," regardless of his or her gender). There is no use keeping a locoed cow around. She isn't any good to anybody.

A horse that has been locoed will never be any good either. He seems to have his mind on other things besides being just a horse. He will act as nice as any other horse on his good days but on his days off, the rider usually views the landscape from unexpected heights and new vistas and angles, because a locoed horse doesn't observe the ordinary ethics of pitching. He is a regular Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Until you get him, you never know which he is going to be. But you better pick a safe place and a soft place to light.

Selling horses back East that have had a shot of loco used to be great sport before the boys out here got caught at it. It wasn't very funny to the people who bought locoed horses and got on them without suspecting anything. They usually got right off again but I won't say how or where.

Every once in a while a locoed horse used to be tied up to the hitching rack outside the drugstore, along with the regular cow ponies. These sane horses would stand quiet all day and keep their own side of the hitching rack, but if a paper or a tin can came rolling along the street and blew under the feet of a horse that had been locoed, that cayuse would get so familiar you couldn't stand it. In fact, he got domesticated like a cat and determined he would come inside the store for protection from that terrifying scrap of paper. He just would back into the store, taking the doors off as he came, and for some reason, a locoed horse always seems to be in reverse. If backing didn't get him anywhere, he did some plain and fancy kicking that you wouldn't be likely to see anywhere outside a Russian ballet.

This interfered with business considerably, as it is hard to trade around the back of a bucking beast. We would have to

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go out and round up enough men to evict the uninvited customer. He had to be pulled out head first, as nobody wanted to risk his life and looks by going around the rear end. It was strictly one-way traffic when persuading a locoed horse off the board walk where he was blocking the entrance to the store with his differential.

When the horse finally caught on to the big idea, he usually made a wild lunge, clean over the hitching rack in front, jolting the boys who were doing the neighborly act and scaring the pie out of the cow ponies standing there. This kind of thing seems to happen right often, not only in Big Spring but internationally. Some locoed biped acts just like these locoed horses did. What they can't run over, they kick to pieces or tear up, and when some innocent neighbor tries to help out, he gets knocked galley west for his pains.

We still have loco weed out here. It has to be dug up every year in the pastures and the boys always grub it out in order to save their cattle and possibly their own necks.

Another natural phenomenon we have out here which is a funny thing is the arroyo. Like loco, arroyo is a Spanish word, which seems to indicate that Coronado and his men, winding across the Staked Plains, knew about these funny things too. Arroyo means a dry ditch, but to us out here it means caution. Because even on a day when the sun is shining brightly where you are, a rain or a cloudburst may have fallen on the watershed of an arroyo as far as fifty or sixty miles away, and the water will come scourging down in a solid wall, oftentimes as high as fifteen feet. This wall of water descends almost without warning and everything caught in it perishes. In the early days, a wagon train coming on one of these dusty depressions would pull up and stop and look and listen before they started to trek across it. There

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weren't any signs about arroyos, but the teamsters knew. They had learned their lesson the hard way.

Between Pecos and Carlsbad there was a dangerous arroyo which took many lives during the past fifty years, but now there is a bridge over it. You might not need this bridge once a year, but when you need it you need it badly. The water usually runs down in a few hours on account of the grade, but sometimes a flood in the hills would hold up wagon trains for weeks. Supplies would have to be carried one by one across the water on horseback.

Whenever you heard the peculiar rumble of crashing water and looked up to see this tremendous wave, isolated out in the middle of what was practically a desert and rushing toward you over a dry creek bed, it was time to whip your horses or drown. My older brother got caught in one of these things once — drove a buggy into it but he was a good swimmer, abandoned his trap and rescued several damsels who were in the same fix. If you have never seen a lady in a wide skirt, four petticoats and a bustle, struggling against the current, you don't know what a rescue problem is. This kind of an outfit can sure get heavy when it is wet and it takes a man to pull it out of the arroyo. Besides, the girls were plumper in those days. After he had dragged two or three of them out, they spit up considerable water and then fainted — a popular feminine reaction at the time, and that was worse for him than fighting the current.

Well, that's the way it is. We hardly ever have enough rain but when we have rain, we have more damn water than we know what to do with. There was a flood in 1900 that divided the town square in two parts and the water stood five feet deep in the depot for ten days. It's a funny thing, but out here, like everywhere else, it hardly ever rains but it pours.



## IT'S A FUNNY THING

Another funny thing out here is that the highest mountain east of the Rockies is located in Texas, which most people think is as flat as your hand. You hear about all kinds of high mountains in the eastern part of the United States, but the highest one this side of the Great Divide is in the Big Bend of Texas. It is called by various names but most folks call it El Capitan. It is 9,500 feet tall and a rough customer. There is a granite mountain out here, too, that has islands on top of it. Rainwater collects in pools on it and marsh grass grows up in the rainwater pools and makes peculiar islands.

A lot of people have remarked to me that it is a funny thing that the brands you see on cows are often backwards. For instance, the brand of the Waggoner herds is three reverse D's. The answer to that one is that the cowhand who forged the brand made three perfect D's and it never occurred to him that when you put them on the cow, they would be turned around. That's why a lot of lettered brands look peculiar.

One of the funniest things out here is the sandstorm — and I don't mean humorous. When one of these dusters nudges over the horizon, we know we are in for it, and a real sandstorm gives life a new dimension. A blackout has nothing on a sandstorm for anonymity and people have been known to ride right on through Big Spring, following the road, without ever knowing the town was there. We have picked up quite a lot of new soil this way and sometimes, when the dust settles down, you can locate sediment that must have come from as far away as Arizona, as it certainly is not the color of our dirt.

Of course, I never saw this happen, but I know a fellow who once said he saw a prairie dog happily digging his hole during a sandstorm, and the funny thing about it was that the prairie dog was ten feet above the top of the ground and

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didn't know it. I have seen the sand so thick down these streets that it got dark in the daytime and the chickens all went to roost. When a customer wanted to buy anything along in March or April, he was hard to recognize under his coat of sand and, I'm telling you, his was no skin that you loved to touch. If the girls hadn't been hard up to marry and had ever been anywhere else, this country would have looked like the Sahara Desert because you can't tell me that any woman could love any man who looked like those birds did. But every single one of them married and this country had more kids than any place its size on earth.

There's nothing funny about a prairie fire, but it's kind of unique, and I don't reckon they have them any place much except here. I don't guess anybody ever knew how they got started. Sometimes it was a campfire that wasn't put out properly, or sometimes a careless hand would throw down his lighted cigarette as he was riding along, and sometimes folks thought lightning did the trick. The results were the



*There's nothing funny about a prairie fire . . .*

## IT'S A FUNNY THING

same — the flame ran along the dry grass — always like tinder — and hell broke loose in West Texas.

If you've never seen a prairie fire, maybe you're lucky. They were a terrible sight. They start harmlessly — like a social upheaval, and they end up the same way, with death, destruction, and hideous flames in their wake. They race along with the velocity of the wind, spreading over the dry landscape like a wild wave on the beach. There is no more powerful drama than one of these fires. Animals that have always been bitter enemies run side by side before the intense heat. They fly as high as they can into the copper-colored sky to get away from the scourge, and the buzzards circle higher and higher, knowing they will have barbecue to last for weeks — any selection they care for. They can have quail without toast, wild hogs, beef steers, antelope, coyotes, or anything that suits their taste.

The loss of wild animals was not the worst. Domestic critters suffered too. After one of these fires passed over, grazing was nonexistent, and the herds went hungry. The blazes used to be miles long and ranchmen frantically sought aid from everybody who could fling a wet sack. Men, women, and children would wring sacks and blankets out of rain barrels of water and beat at the flames with them. The ranchmen would plow a wide furrow ahead of the blaze, but unless they got it mighty wide before the flames licked up to it, the fire would leap the furrow and go right on. They also started fires in front of the big blaze and these backfires would make a charred area to stop the big one from progressing. Sometimes all human efforts were to no avail and the conflagration would rage until it reached a natural draw, or a rain would come to put it out.

The fires often raged for days and days, sometimes weeks. The smoke was visible for miles, and the nights were hideous

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with the reflection of the light. The spectacle was anything but pleasant to people who made their living on the land. It was a little like a preview of Hades. When some of us get there and remember those old prairie fires, we'll probably say, "I've seen this somewhere before." When they were over, the destruction was complete. The country was black and charred where it had been green and pretty before. The mesquite trees stood like lonely, gnarled sentinels in the black waste, uglier than a battlefield. The air was hazy for days and the dispositions of the ranchmen were hazy for months, due to the fact that they were wondering where the herds were going to find food. No, there was nothing funny about a prairie fire, unless you mean funny hell.

"I bet you had the biggest, hottest, wildest, most destructive prairie fires here ever held on earth," my friend said.

"Of course we did," I said. "I'd like you to show me a place where they had any better ones!"

# 16

## BOOK LEARNING

“I suppose you walked five miles to the little red school-house through the blinding snowstorms when you were young,” my friend said. “That’s the way it was with all the pioneers I read about.”

“It wasn’t that bad,” I told him. “But school wasn’t any soft snap in those days. We hadn’t got around to progressive education. We had to learn to spell.”

“You mean spelling bees?” he asked.

“Yes sir,” I said, “and they had the longest words in that old Blue Back Speller. I don’t know where they found ’em. Some of those words I haven’t heard from that day to this. Looks like they tried to make school just as hard as possible.”

In 1898, schools were for “larnin’ ” and not for football. The pep that developed during the long hours in the double desks, where two sat, boys together, was usually whipped out of us after school. This was before the invention of psychology and a child did not have to be encouraged to express himself. He had to be made to refrain and, if he didn’t learn to refrain, he just naturally got the tar whaled out of him.

Jim Winslow says a teacher durn near beat him to death when he was a kid, right here in Big Spring, for a little thing like knocking a dipper of water out of a girl’s hand. This was common practice, but Jim got caught. After the professor

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had worn out three or four switches, Jim got mad and slapped back, but it didn't help much — just made the old man more furious. But it did accomplish one thing — Jim learned his lesson. He never got licked in school again.

There weren't any parent-teachers associations then, and it was plain to see whose side the parents were on. They were on the teacher's side. As soon as you got through getting one licking at school, you went home and, instead of your Pa taking it up with the school authorities and bawling them out for molesting you, he took off his belt and gave you another licking for having got licked at school. I reckon this is why none of us ever were thin-skinned after we got grown.

The kids all walked to school then or came on horseback if it was too far to walk. When I see women spending half their lives chauffeuring a bunch of kids to and from school every day, I wonder what kind of grown people these kids are going to turn out to be. We all had our lunch boxes, and the main joy of lunch hour was to trade off everything our Ma had fixed for us to somebody else for what their Ma had fixed for them. There were times when I could trade off everything in my box for pickles, which made a very satisfying lunch if you do not care about a balanced diet and you do care about pickles.

One teacher usually handled two grades, and I do mean handled them. After spending more than the allotted time in the grades, I finally made high school, and at that time we had a fine old man by the name of Professor Thompson at the head of the school. He was a very dignified gentleman whose folks raised him in Kentucky, with one of those white Kentucky-gentlemen goatees and a moustache to match (kind of like you see in the whiskey ads now). He was very efficient in Latin and history, neither of which I ever mastered. We had the Civil War every day for years, and when we didn't

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know our lessons in Meyer's *Ancient History*, we could always get out of lessons by asking him a question or so about the Civil War, and then he took up the whole period fighting the Yankees, while we listened and got out of being asked questions about the current Greek problem.

We had two girls from Tennessee who had just moved into our town. They were unusually bright, but it seems that the dictionary wasn't used too much in the part of Tennessee that they came from, so they would cut loose every once in a while with some good 'uns. There was one place in that old Meyer's *History* that told about the Spartan youth who caught a fox and when his father caught him, rather than have his father know what he had done, he concealed the fox under his tunic, where the fox scratched the boy's vitals out without the boy showing any pain in his facial expression. The gal recently from Tennessee had to get up and tell the story to the class. When she got to the place about the fox tearing the vitals out of the hero, she said, "Yes sir, Professor, that boy concealed that fox under his shirt and it tore his vittles out." Which is an argument in itself to have these durn words pronounced the way they are spelled. We got out of class and got to go home as school was out. Years afterward that old Professor would ask the girl every time he saw her how her favorite Spartan youth was making it without his victuals.

Mr. Thompson was always immaculately dressed and bore himself with the pride and dignity of a man of education and civilization. He had a Master of Arts degree and had once been vice-president of Baylor University. I don't know what he was doing way out West, but he came and stayed and his influence on everybody who went to school to him is still prevalent. He charted his own course and it was a tough one, which included four years of straight Latin whether you liked

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it or not. If you didn't like the course or the way Mr. Thompson taught it, you could just get out. He believed in discipline and he practiced what he preached.

I didn't like the course and it didn't like me, so you know what happened. Anyhow, I was awfully busy peddling papers and trying to get to be a druggist. So I never did graduate; which is no credit to me. I guess Mr. Thompson had a hard row to hoe at that. Most of the boys were big strapping



*The girls were very pleasant to pick on.*

things, more interested in extracurricular activities like sticking a pin through the toe of their shoes and giving every girl that went down the aisle a jab in the ankle with it to watch her jump, than they were in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The girls were very pleasant to pick on. You could tie their braids of hair together and stick them in an inkwell, if you happened to be sitting behind them. With all these interesting prospects lying around it was well-nigh impossible to concentrate on Latin conjugations or the far-off problems of the Greeks and Romans.

Last night a group of old-timers were in the store and, like



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all old folks when they get together, the first thing they did was to have the country going to the dogs, and the second was to lambast the young people. I suggested to them that if they would look back, some of the things the kids do now would be very mild indeed when compared to some of the things we did.

For instance, I don't think any of these kids now would load a muzzle-loading shotgun with slugs and sticks and get some old ignorant boy to crawl up on the dam of one of these more-or-less filled waterholes, and get him to point that thing at a bunch of somebody's tame ducks and turn it loose. It always hurt the boy shooting the gun a whole lot worse than it would the ducks.

However, sometimes we would get the poor dumb kid to put his shoulder against a post and shoot the muzzle-loaded gun; all of which would pretty near always put the kid to bed for a week.

Hallowe'en night was celebrated in the village by the bad boys each year, and when the carnage was over, there wasn't a two-holer left in town in an upright position. I remember one instance in which there was an occupant riding the hole when the house was overturned; however, that was a rare instance, and at that time there was no loss of life. We did cause the old boy to lose his dignity, though. He is still alive and this is more or less a confession; but, since he is too old to do anything about the matter now, I'll admit it. I was at least there.

Look back at all the things we did on Hallowe'en night, such as taking all the delivery wagons in town out and coming back the next day and collecting for the safe return of the delivery wagons and, sometimes, the horse himself. And I just wonder what some of these soda-skeets up in the front of the store would do if they had to make their fun like we

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did then. How many of us would have been serving life sentences in the pen if we had had the things to play with in those days that the kids have now. We were a lot meaner because we had more time on our hands and less to do with it.

We had our chores to do, but life itself was geared up on a much slower scale than it is now, milking the cow and cutting the wood (if we could find any wood to cut), chopping the kindling and carrying out the ashes. Taken as a whole, the kids of today are a whole lot better than the kids were then. But they have lost a lot of their initiative, because so many things are created for them and they are more or less like a cow that you feed all winter and in the spring, when you turn her out, she won't even graze.

We keep ten or twelve working for us all the time, and I think they are very interesting to watch and study, and they keep you younger to have them around. This story that goes around from one generation to another since Adam's time, about the present-day youth going to hell, has become more or less legend because I think there are just as many old folks in hell as there are kids.

Every small town in West Texas has some animal that is, more or less, a land mark in the community. Sometimes it covers more than just one community. These mascots were the delight of the kids. We had one old white sow who always had a litter of sixteen or eighteen pigs every time the laws of nature would allow it, and she would always take great pride in leading her pigs up Main Street and across the sidewalks on Saturday afternoons when the railroad boys got off or the ranch hands were in. I don't think there has been a time in the last forty years when I have seen a white hog, that I would not have placed a two-to-one bet that I knew the lady who was ancestor to that hog. This white sow had her

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office in the alley back of the store, would often rest herself and her pigs in the shade of a four-hole Chic Sale and she would lie there until she was forced to get out and mooch around the T & P eating-house for something to support her family on. It seems that this particular sow was always the town's pet and though she had some rather peculiar ways, she at least was busy with mass production, and we are bound to admit that, from the number of white pigs that we see in the community now, her strain was hearty. Although I have never seen a white boar in the community, I am sure there must have been at least one, because all of these pigs were always white (all eighteen of them) and we knew just exactly when the crop was going to arrive, by allowing a few minutes check over the biological time.

In about 1902, as well as I can remember, the prairie dogs were doomed to die, since they were getting too numerous in the community. They were poisoned with the carbon disulphide I told you about, and the druggist ordered this carbon in large drums, which we pumped into smaller cans and sold to large ranch owners. The ranchmen would pour about a tablespoonful down each prairie dog hole and cover the hole up and kill all the dogs in the hole, because the fumes were heavier than air and would go down into the hole and gas the dogs. I suppose the store handled three or four hundred gallons during one spring and summer for this purpose, and it still retains its value in causing any animal to go "high behind" when a few drops are sprinkled around its back. The immediate effect was to get said animal to start to running and squealing or yelping, as the case may be. One Saturday afternoon I was filling these cans of carbon disulphide, and I happened to look out and see the old white sow in the alley, sleeping with her litter in the mud, and the more I

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thought about throwing some of that hi-life on her, the funnier and funnier it got to me. Finally, I could not resist the temptation any longer, as I could picture this old sow and her eighteen pigs running and squealing toward the tracks. But when I threw it on her, instead of her acting according to Hoyle, she took the wrong route and lit out on the shortcut, up through Main Street and ran under the horses that were hitched there, under the chinaberry tree, and rubbed some hi-life off on the horses' legs, and some of them lost their dignity and went through the saloons. One or two of them left their buggies in a rather undignified manner, and I suppose there must have been at least sixty or seventy first-class runaways on the main drag that afternoon. Lots of ranch horses, at that time, had not made the acquaintance of the white sow and especially in the way that she was presenting herself with her eighteen pigs, squealing and running under their feet. It was one more funny sight to see those horses stampeding. It was not until more than thirty years later that I even admitted this to myself, but I still think it was one of the funniest darn things that ever happened to me in my whole life. Every time I smell carbon disulphide, I can see that old white sow with her eighteen pigs, squealing and running through all of the stores on Main Street, and the mass of runaways with saddles underneath the horses' bellies, and every cowhand wondering what in hell was the matter with his horse.

Book learning may have suffered in Big Spring forty years ago, but the kids, especially the boys, did acquire quite a large fund of general information. I hardly ever have any use for the conjugation of a Latin verb, but every time I think of that old white sow with the hi-life on her, I laugh fit to split my sides.

## BOOK LEARNING

"Sounds like you took animal husbandry," my friend laughed.

"Naw," I said, "We didn't need to take it, except for extra-curricular activity, but you know what — there was a grown girl down here visiting last summer from some big city up East. She graduated from some fancy school up there, and I'll be durned if that gal didn't ask me why a cow gave milk. What is education coming to these days — that's what I'd like to know!"

# 17

## FOLKS AT HOME

“Oh give me a home where the buffalo roam . . .”  
“It’s too late,” I said. “The buffalo are all gone and anyhow, they never made such friendly neighbors.”

“I was just thinking about home,” he went on.

“Good subject,” I said. “Home is the whole foundation of our way of living. Somebody said, ‘From love of home, the love of country derives’ and he sure enough was right. Whenever you see home going to pot and getting to be just a place to hang your hat or get your mail, then sure as fate there’s trouble ahead for the whole system.

“Home hasn’t got anything to do with outward appearances when you come right down to it. Course any man wants a good snug place to live, all fixed up to please his women folks, but home actually hasn’t got anything to do with brick and stone, and you can hang up a bunch of draperies and strew fine furniture all over a regular palace, and you haven’t got home if there isn’t something deep down inside you and the people you live with — that glad feeling that comes of sharing and doing and remembering things together — good things and things not so good. Home is not home unless it’s a refuge against the world and all its troubles — but don’t get me started on home.”

“That was what I was aiming to do,” he told me.

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Who was it wrote, "Home is the place where if you go they have to let you in." It was that Yankee poet, I think, man name of Robert Frost — the same one wrote about "something there is that does not like a wall." You know, I believe that fellow would really understand us folks out here. It's a funny thing, too — him coming from way off up there in New England and knowing how people he never saw or heard tell of think about things. It makes you feel like we are not so far apart in this country, even if a lot of miles lie in between. It makes you feel kind of snug and united to find out people in New England are not really any different from people in Big Spring. "Good fences make good neighbors," he said. Well, they do — and home is the place you always get back to — no matter how far off you wander or how long you live. Even if there's not a plank left of the place, your mind goes back there — and they always let you in.

Home in Big Spring, or anywhere on these prairies out here, was never a very sumptuous affair. People lived in tents at first, made out of buffalo hide and mesquite sticks and anything they could find. They lived in those dugouts I told you about — with sod walls and a dirt floor and a canvas rag flapping in the front. And they lived in little two-by-four houses. But they were all home and darn if a fellow wouldn't fight, bleed, and die for them.

Before the advent of lumber, though many rocks were at hand or a few miles away, the headquarter homes were the best we had. They were no palaces in the modern manner of speaking. They were usually of the lean-to variety with two rooms in front and two rooms in the rear, regardless of the size of the family or the number of pounds that each weighed. If there was a well, it usually had a windmill; then a tank mounted on the platform high enough to give the water enough fall to run to the house, if pipe was available.

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Very few homes had this running water in the house. The usual thing was for the water to run into a barrel near the windmill, then from the barrel into a "tank" dug out of the soil, with a dam all 'round. This dam supplied water for the cattle as it ran through a pipe to the water trough on the outside where the cattle quenched their thirst. At times we would have a windless week or two, usually in August, and man and beast would go dry.

The family laundry was done at the tank and the whole family life centered around it. Water was mighty important. In many sections north, they had no windmills, as it was in a dry belt where no wells were found. Here the boys and gals hitched up their wagons and went to town after a few barrels of water about twice a week.

The larger homes of big ranching outfits consisted of ten to twelve rooms, but this type of a house was scarce. I don't remember many. Practically all were houses made of wood. That has always been interesting to me. In the hill country you would see a little wooden shack perched right on top of enough rocks to build a court house, but the rocks were not used except to build a corral to keep the horses penned up at night or to pen the sheep.

We had a few rock fences but not many, though the rocks in the rough country south were right under foot and loose too. Fences were not too popular anyway. These folks were as open-minded as the very country and seemed to resent being penned up in any way. The houses were in most part makeshift. Everything seemed ready to "take off" at the first drought, and that seemed the only thing that came with any regularity.

The average home sported a hanging lamp over the table in the dining room as well as the other rooms in the house, but it has always seemed to me that the important gathering



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place in the long winter evenings was around the dining table. After the dishes were cleared away, most of the members of the family gathered around this table to study, play finch or dominoes, or to read the latest news about Dewey and the battles of the Spanish-American War.

Now, as I look back and think of the days when all the family gathered around one table, with one smoking coal stove in the house, I wonder what we would do or talk about if all of our present-day families gathered around one table anywhere and, if forced to gather around again, I wonder what in the name of common sense we could talk about.

The parlor, when there was one, was always got up with a horsehair sofa, and I used to think maybe that's why the women wore so many petticoats. They had to have some kind of protection against that horsehair. The parlor usually had a what-not with a bunch of souvenirs on it, like an abalone shell some relative had sent back from California, and a stereopticon to look through and a stack of colored picture cards of Niagara Falls, and other wonders of the world. If the people were rich, there was nearly always an organ with a round stool in front of it, covered with plush and with fringe hanging down. Sometimes there would be an enlarged crayon portrait of Ma and Pa hanging side by side in large gilded frames, and maybe there would be a little walnut table with a marble top, freighted from some of the states way back East, and the pride and joy of the lady of the house. We had some patent rockers, too, and the modern people maybe had a golden oak Morris chair with plush cushions.

The parlor had lace curtains and dried bouquets in it and always smelled kind of closed-up and musty because the ladies didn't want the sand to get in or the blazing sun to spoil the color of the carpet. They kept parlors closed up, and whenever you saw one of those round-globe lamps with

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the roses on the bowl shining through the window at night, you might know that sparking was in progress. Young folks, after the case was pretty far advanced, could court in the parlor, but otherwise it was reserved for functions like weddings and funerals and receptions, one as sad as the other.

Out in the hall there was a hall-tree, a horrendous structure with a lot of branching brass hooks to hang hats on and a seat nobody ever sat on, and a place to stick umbrellas and canes. The hall was the place for calendar art and there was nearly always a calendar from the drugstore or the local general merchandise institution — usually a highly colored outdoor scene peopled with a lovesick Indian maiden or else a nymph kneeling on the edge of a pool. This was where the 'phone was too — after there got to be a 'phone.

I remember the first 'phone I ever saw, and I remember hearing about them long before I ever saw one, and not believing a word of it. A few citizens swore they had seen them, down at Dallas, and some even claimed to have talked over them, but we didn't put much stock in that. However, one day in 1905, we had one in the drugstore. I say we had *one* because we had the only one, and it was a long time before we had much use for it in town, but it was a connection with the world outside. Our 'phone was Number One. It still is. I wouldn't take a pretty for that number. It has been part of my life so long.

The telephones were great big objects with a crooked neck and they had a shelf to lean your elbow on. This was very useful because it took so durn long to get a number, you needed some place to lean. They had a crank on the side and a loud bell. They hung on the wall and most everybody was scared to death of them. When anybody would come into the drugstore to make a call, a crowd would gather round and watch the operation with great interest. They

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wanted to see what happened before they took a chance on using the new-fangled contraption themselves. One old lady never did give in to the telephone. She said it was just a silly box with somebody inside of it.

I remember an instance when a man rode into town and his wife made him promise to call her niece up and report on the illness of her mother. She told him just to say, "Aunt Mollie is getting along better."



*The old boy had never talked on the phone . . .*

The old boy never had talked on the 'phone and he was terrified. He came into the store, walked back to the 'phone and up to the mouthpiece. Then, without even twisting the crank or taking the receiver off the hook or making any move to get central, he put his face up to the mouthpiece and yelled, "Your Aunt Mollie is better," and turned around and bolted out of the store.

But by-and-by everybody saw the advantage of the telephone system and put them in, and you could see one in nearly any hallway. It was a great help to the women folks. They could get twice as much talking done.

The bedrooms of the house mostly had great big iron beds or wooden beds with high headboards. Nobody ever heard of a twin bed, and the beds were long and wide, and they were fancied up with homemade bedspreads and round hard rolls of wood with embroidered slips on them which they

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called bolsters. There was usually a dresser in the room with a mirror, where the women combed and brushed their hair. They didn't have any face paint or powder to speak of, but the hairbrushing was a beauty rite which went on every night. Hair was the crowning glory and if a woman didn't have hair she could sit on, she felt downright ashamed. Clothes were kept in a wardrobe — a big wooden cabinet affair, as nobody had ever thought of building a closet into a room for the purpose. Every room had a washstand and on top of this was a bowl with a pitcher inside of it which held the water for the morning ablutions. Sometimes, in the winter, you had to crack the ice in the pitcher to pour out the water, but that face-washing durn sure waked you up. The washstand usually had a rod across the top where the towels were hung. There was a cabinet underneath where they kept the receptacle.

Most folks had a feather bed and everybody had patchwork quilts because the women were forever and eternally making them. They were right pretty too, and when you looked at some of them, you could remember your whole life history, written in scraps of cloth from your habiliments and feather-stitched together with red thread. Girls got feather beds for their wedding presents, and they made quilts and hemmed up sheets and linen. It was just part of getting married.

The boys usually all slept in one room together and the girls in another room. We used to have terrible pillow fights and knock-downs and drag-outs after we were supposed to have retired for the night. Many's the time Pa had to take off his belt and go in the boys' room and read the riot act to a bunch of kids in long white nightshirts, who were tearing up the place. Pa was almighty too, and if he happened to stop a pillow as he came through the door, there sure was hell to pay. As soon as the call-down arrived, the feud be-

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tween the younger set was over and they all lined up against parental vengeance. There wasn't anything to fight about after Pa came.

Bathrooms were unknown, of course, and I was nearly grown before I even saw a commode. The first time I pulled the chain on one, it nearly scared me to death, and I imagine that Chic Sale felt himself slipping when they were invented.

When the houses were equipped with bathrooms, the old bowl and pitcher had to take the count, as well as the hand-painted slop jar which adorned every lady's bedroom. They were wows too, and you could get any color from red to a pale blue, with flowers to match your fancy, and the china receptacle under the bed, of course, had to match the slop jar, especially in the better circles. There was always a surplus of tin ware in the poorer class bedrooms, and it wasn't handpainted. In fact, it usually bore some label about ten pounds of "So-and-So's Lard."

The advent of bathroom stationery was a blow to the mail-order houses, because before that time, the folks out here had so much more time to sit and think and compare prices. As it now exists, the folks who have moved their thinking department into the house, rarely ever have a place to hang the catalogue, and besides, it's just kinder out of style; but in them good old days, no child's education was complete until he or she was proficient in the prices and page number of the mail-order catalogue.

The hot water we had for our weekly or fortnight bath was heated on a coal stove, and the dirtiest member of the family bathed last in the old washtub, and it fell his lot to empty out the mud. The bathing, of course, was done in an air-conditioned kitchen, especially well air-conditioned in the winter time. Towels were not too plentiful either. If the

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family towel got too wet from previous use, we would hang it behind the stove to dry until we could use it again.

The soap that we used didn't smell like a geranium. It was usually Grandpa's Tar, and the odor of the soap told everybody in the neighborhood that we were having a bath-night. It was usually Saturday and everybody else was doing the same. The water out here was usually so hard that soap didn't amount to much anyway, and soda was used to make the water soft enough to get up a lather with Grandpa's soap. The girls in the family added a few drops of violet to their bath, and violet and Grandpa's Tar made a marvelous odor.

Even the tooth brushes were larger than they are today. A man wouldn't pay twenty-five cents for a tooth brush unless he could get one large enough for the whole family. As far as tooth paste was concerned, we just didn't have any.

We did have toothpowder though, so full of pumice stone that you felt like your mouth had been sandpapered for at least an hour after you had used it. We had a mouth wash or so, containing large quantities of this and that, all guaranteed to cure any disease from the nose to the pit of the stomach. They were accepted on their face value and possibly did a great amount of good, at least it made us think so. The massage that they gave their gums with that old oversized toothbrush did them good, and probably saved many teeth that would have fallen by the wayside. But it must be remembered that that was before we had pyorrhoea. We just got well because we couldn't afford to have things that we now enjoy so much.

The kitchen, which was one of the most important places in any home, was a nice place, though it wasn't pretty the way kitchens are this day and time. There usually was a wood stove in the corner, with a crooked stovepipe and four

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eyes on the top. When the fire was hot, the eyes on top of the stove would get red hot. There wasn't any sink, naturally, because there wasn't any running water to put in it. Water was kept in a bucket with a dipper hanging alongside. Food was kept in a safe. It was a wooden cabinet, two stories high, with drawers below and two doors with perforated tin in them in front. The table had oilcloth on the top. There wasn't any refrigerator. There was an earthenware churn in every kitchen, with an old flip-flop wooden dasher, which the kids had to flip-flop. There was a tea kettle on the stove and we used to howl for Mama to pour hot water in the churn to make the butter "come." The sad irons were kept on a shelf except on ironing day, when the stove was fired up and women shoved them back and forth across all the petticoats they insisted on wearing.

It is hard to imagine women carrying water to the house for everything water is used for; making soap and washing the clothes and ironing them; baking all the bread and cooking three meals a day every day, making the clothes and taking care of the children and having more children. But that's what they did, and, in addition, they hoed the gardens and hovered over a few sickly flowers, and planted rosebush slips under old glass fruit jars, and nourished a few trees along, and they had time to go to prayer meeting and church. Still, they were the heart of home — the way mothers usually are — and they had time to give their children love and affection, and a good wearing-out with a switch if they happened to need it.

The kids weren't allowed to loaf much either, but we didn't feel ill-used. There it was to be done and we knew we better do it. We carried in wood, carried out ashes; milked the cow, cleaned up the lot, curried the horse, and filled the durn lamps with kerosene and polished their chimneys and

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trimmed the wicks. We used to get tired of our chores, but it's a funny thing — when you look back on those times, it seems like those chores were real pleasant.

Times like hog-killing! My goodness, I used to hate hog-killing time. They always picked out the coldest day in the year. It had to be cold so the meat wouldn't spoil and your hands would freeze to the water bucket while you were pumping the water to put in the wash boiler to get boiling hot. Then the sharp knives would come out and the pig would be stuck, scalded, and scraped and hung up, and the meat-cutting and salting down and sausage grinding and rendering of lard would begin. There would be hog meat and chunks of fat and bags of salt lying all over the place, and you'd think you never would want to look pork in the face again. But the next morning, when you had brains and eggs for breakfast, hog-killing time was wonderful. When the first norther hits out here and I wake up on winter mornings, sniffing the white frost, I get a hankering to kill hogs again, but I reckon it wouldn't be the same. Not any more.

Well, that was home — the light shining through the night, the warm place in the middle of the great lonesomeness. And inside those little, bare houses, the business of living went on — the things that made living important and valuable. Love and loyalty and devotion and being together with the family, a little united band against the elements and the vicissitudes and the misfortunes and the menaces of pioneering.

I keep telling you we were happy — and we were. The reason we were, was because of those things — love and loyalty, and devotion and honor and hard work, and taking things the way they came and looking our problems in the eye and having a place where, when we went, they always took us in. Sometimes I look at families now — the old folks lonesome and dissatisfied, the kids sophisticated and spoiled, and I



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think of us in those days. We didn't have much but each other, but what else do people want but their own folks sticking by them.

I don't say we ought to get back to that. People can't go back. It's no use trying to go back. But we ought to get together, right where we are. Maybe it would be a novelty some night, if the whole durn family stayed home and sat around the dining-room table and talked about things, that is, if you could lasso them out of the movies, and drag 'em out of autos and lure them away from bridge, and cut off the radio and get together. Parents and children barely get acquainted nowadays. They just meet in passing. The home has kind of fallen into disrepute, in spite of the hot and cold running water, electric ice box, vacuum cleaner, and curtains made by a decorator. With all the trappings it doesn't mean a thing, if it doesn't have the kind of spirit that holds it together — the stuff that made a dugout a right nice place.

Well, here I do go, shooting off my mouth. But it is something to think about — something for parents and children. When a country has got homes like that, nothing on God's green earth can lick it, and any dictator that thinks so has made a hell of a mistake.

# 18

## SOMETHING ABOUT SUNSETS

**M**y friend came into the store looking kind of droopy the other night.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked him.

"I'll take a chocolate ice cream soda," he said, mopey-like.

"I know what you need," I said. "You need a dose of sunset."

"What's that?"

"Well it's kind of mixed-up in my mind," I admitted. "But I guess you'd call it philosophy or something like that."

"Shoot," he said.

"Well," I began,

The other day I was standing in the front door of the store looking out across the paved street into the tall hotels and sixteen-story buildings that have sprung up in Big Spring and I remembered the way you used to look out the door and see the sun go down behind three little nobs of hills, during the long summer twilights, when there wasn't anything in the way to obstruct your view except the blacksmith shop.

Well, it occurred to me that the sun is setting the same way it always has and if something has got in the way of my watching it, that's partly my fault. The world has changed in all its outward aspects but the eternal truths go on just as

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when I was a little shaver selling papers in front of the drug-store door and thousands of years before that.

The trouble with me and a lot of other folks I guess is that we can't see the sunset for the buildings, which is just another way of saying we can't see the wood for the trees.

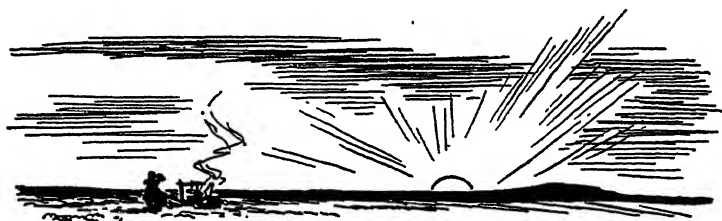
But it occurred to me too, that I was going to see more sunsets. Out here in West Texas we have the kind of sunsets you seldom find. People have traveled all over Europe and Asia to look at something that's not half as wonderful. West Texas sunsets are nearly always unusual, like the weather in California, and you can't tell about them, anymore than you can describe the Grand Canyon. No one of them is ever like another and it looks kind of like the Lord just superintends the job himself every evening, reaching out and pushing a few little clouds over the horizon, so the colors will have different shades and gradations, and sending the bars of light hither and yon so they will appear to the best advantage, and lighting the lamp of the evening star in the high arc of heaven, just at the proper minute. If some fellow with book learning could figure out the right language to sell these sunsets with, we wouldn't have a room available in any of our tall hotels. If anybody who reads this wants a guide on a sunset hunt — I'm offering my services free.

It's a real experience to get out here on one of these little hills and watch the sun go down over the prairies. It's medicine for the soul and nobody can really hate anybody when he is looking off into a West Texas sunset. Just watch the sunset and then squat down on the ground and drink coffee out of an old tomato can and eat some bacon, fried over a prairie fire, and you're at peace with the world, and you can get a kind of a little peephole into the world to come. Yes, sir, sunsets, and coffee in the open and bacon without malice

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— all that makes a wonderful equalizer. When you've got that, you haven't got anything to fight about.

Sunsets don't change, and when you get right down to it, people don't change much either. Every chapter in the Bible tries to make some improvement on human nature, but darn if I can see that much is accomplished along this line. All the modern conveniences haven't changed people inside so's



*... sunsets, and coffee in the open and bacon without malice ...*

you could notice it. People get away from the simple truths sometimes, but deep inside them are buried all the things they really know and are. You just have to back down to it.

Take for instance these folks that are always running to some guy with long whiskers or some fortune teller, who wouldn't be allowed to hang around the sideshows in any self-respecting carnival, to get their palms read or to find out about the past and the future. Of course the past is easy and the seer always has a good one about the star that is the guide to your destiny, and all that is holding you back is Venus or Mercury who happens to be against you. As soon as your planet gets in the right spot you will conquer the world. Well, I've been watching these folks, and their planet or mine never seems to get in the right position at the right time. I've always had to get to work and sweat my destiny out of its acute and hungry position, as no planet to date has ever been interested enough in me to do it for me.

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Your star is within you and nobody is guiding it except yourself. I got a notion people carve out their own destinies pretty much, and the astral bodies are not in on it. When you get to feeling sour and depressed, what you usually need is a dose of common sense and Epsom salts, at the same time.

It seems to me that anybody who can give wisdom or pleasure or surcease of pain or even just a good belly laugh to the world around him, ought to do it. That's the way good things get around. I never did like a stingy man and don't think one ever liked himself. If you got something to give, then give it, and don't give it grudgingly. About the most people want to give in this day and time is advice and I wouldn't always call that a good thing.

The other evening I saw a man who came here in the early 80's sitting on his porch and stopped to talk to him. It's hard to get a story out of these men. You just have to sit around and wait 'til they open up.

He used to be kind of wild when he was a young man. I remembered him and reminded him about the time that he got nervous with his trigger finger here in '98. Then he loosened up a bit.

I asked him the usual question as to why he came out here. He looked into the distance and said, "Son, nearly all of us came to this country because we had killed a carpetbagger or to keep from killing one."

Then I asked him why we had so many men from the North here, and he said that they hated the carpetbaggers too. They were so disgusted with things after the war that they decided to listen to Horace Greeley's paper and everybody just got to coming in the general direction of Texas, and when they got to East Texas, somebody rode into the camps from out here and delivered a Chamber of Commerce

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talk and next morning they came on this way. It didn't make much difference anyhow. They had lost everything. They wanted a New Deal only they expected to work for theirs, and now we expect the government to hand it to us and we want a silver platter under it too.

The Old-timer said that human nature hasn't changed. Those on the bottom want to be on top and usually get there, and when they get there they tear the bottom out of it and start all over again. He said it usually takes a couple of hundred years for us to have universal peace, and then it always ends up with the damndest dog fight ever.

I started to checking myself, and I'll be durned if the Old-timer isn't right.

The Old-timer said, "Human nature's not going to change 'til we put a limit on what a man can have. 'Tain't good for any man to have more than he can be comfortable with and he oughtn't leave any to make a fool out of his kids." He also said that what we call a civilized nation is a nation with a chronic case of the running fits, same as dogs have, only the dogs' don't last long and men just run from one generation to another getting worse and worse and not satisfied 'til they've piled up money and washed it in somebody's tears.

The Old-timer said that as far back as he could remember, everybody started to fighting "sumpin'" or "somebody" as soon as they were born and kept it up 'til they were dead, that they started dying as soon as they were born like everything else. But we took ourselves too seriously. He said every one of us thought that he would be missed personally after passing on, and then he asked me how many folks I remembered who had died that were my neighbors and if I remembered anything about them much.

I talked to him about long-horned cattle, and he said that the cattle business was breeding to get better cattle all the

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time and that the human family was breeding to see just how sorry it could get before it fell through. He said that a long-horned steer was worth about ten dollars and the cattle they raise now are worth that much when they are three days old. I have kind of been thinking that one over.

Said that the Laws governing the "survival of the fit" hadn't been improved on any and until men saw fit to kind of abide by the Ten Commandments, either by moral persuasion or by force, we were all in a hell of a fix, and education was not helping it any excepting making folks look down on those who couldn't talk some language besides English and making softies out of everybody. The Old-timer said everybody wanted to wear a starched shirt, and there wasn't enough shirts or men either to go round. Somebody is going to have to sweat. Always has been that way. All of the ancient civilizations fell when they got to getting so that sweat made them sick. Some country that didn't mind the odor whipped hell out of the starched brethren and took over.

Said that it was bedtime, so I took off.

Well, here I am again, giving you a piece of my lip, and I wouldn't say that was always a good thing either. I don't know how I got to running on like this, but I suppose it comes from that long backward look toward the days of my boyhood, when as they say out here, men were men and that suited the women fine.

Big Spring is different now. It has miles of paved and lighted streets, several skyscrapers, sixteen thousand inhabitants and fifteen drugstores (all about to starve). We have hundreds of oil wells, two refineries, and our annual cotton crop is in the neighborhood of forty thousand bales. We have cattle, sheep, and diversified farming. We have nine schools, many churches, and two of the best golf courses in the West.

## SOMETHING ABOUT SUNSETS

We have a fine city park and an amphitheatre in the side of a hill that will seat eight thousand people so they can listen to music in comfort. We have three hospitals and hundreds of good, stout houses and fine homes. We have built a scenic drive over the mountain where the Comanches used to hide out and watch for the wagon trains. We have got doctors, dentists, lawyers, and merchants galore. We have got a good newspaper and we brought up Silliman Evans, one of the great modern journalists. It doesn't rain any more than it ever did. The plains still roll up toward Colorado, and the foothills still crouch in the background and the sun still sinks over the horizon.

We're proud of our town and proud of what it came from. It's not perfect but still it's got a lot to recommend it. It's a lot like your town, I expect. We want to go right on building it bigger and better, the way all Americans feel about their towns, and we've got a good foundation. When we help build this town, we help build the country and a man can do no more. We kind of want to live up to those brave men and women, living and dead, who dedicated themselves to it. What they accomplished with the little they had to work with, stands as a direct challenge to us.

And it's a challenge we intend to meet!

Maybe you think from the foregoing, that I want to go back to the times I've been talking about. Well, I don't. Like all pioneers, I want to go forward. Not to new areas of geography but to new frontiers of the mind and the spirit. I want to take all the things we've learned from hard times out here and make use of them. I want to keep that honesty of outlook, that ability for feeling righteous anger, that warmth of heart which was always expressed in a western handshake and spread them over a bigger region. I want myself and my people to stay wide between the eyes — to judge every man



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by what he is himself and not try to push him into the pigeonhole of a minority or rate him by what he has piled up in worldly goods. I want and I expect myself and my town to be full of courage. We've got a heritage of courage to live up to and we've got it in our bones. The people we came from didn't know how to quit, and anybody who thinks we are going to act any differently has got another think coming.

Maybe that's the way you feel in your town — wherever it is and whatever it is. Because all towns are alike in the final analysis — just the lengthened shadows of their people. If you love your town, you ought to remember that every time you get on the verge of thinking snide thoughts or doing little mean things it reflects on your town. And if you don't love your town, there's something wrong with you.

Yes, sir, Big Spring is no way like it used to be. The yips and yells of the cowhands, the random crackle of a forty-five spitting out bullets, the bawling of the thirsty herds, the smell of sweaty leather, the grunt of the bucking broncho, the mail hack dashing up in a cloud of dust — all that's gone. But we've still got sunsets and we've still got courage and we still like folks. And that's about all that matters.

"I'm leaving town tomorrow," he said. "Right after sunset."

"Now that's too bad," I said. I felt kind of sorry too. "Thought maybe you might light here for good."

"Nope," he said. "Gotta push farther west."

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I just saw him once more. The next day he came in the store with a roll of paper under his arm.

"Have a soda," I invited. "It's on the house."

## SOMETHING ABOUT SUNSETS

"I hope I never see another one," he said. "I've had enough to last me a lifetime."

"I'll have to agree with you there," I said.

"But here's something for you," he told me. "You remember I said you ought to write a book?"

"I'm not a writer," I said.

"Maybe not," he said, "but you are the goldarndest talker I ever saw."

"Well," I admitted. "I have had a few complaints along that line."

"I've been putting down all the things you said. Don't ask me why. Here it is and as far as I can tell, you have talked a book."

And he handed me the roll of paper. I just added on a few things here and there. I reckon whether it's a book or not is up to you.

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There's just one more thing. If any of you ever happen to be out Big Spring way, come to see us. Hitch your horse, Stranger. Light and set a spell. And stay for dinner. We'd be powerful pleased to see you.

















